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Accountable Actors: Politics and Poetic Imagination in Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell

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ACCOUNTABLE ACTORS:
POLITICS AND POETIC IMAGINATION IN HUXLEY, LEWIS, AND ORWELL

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Political Science

by
Sarah Beth Vosburg
B.A., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2008
M.A., Louisiana State University, 2013
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Blessed are the timid hearts that evil hate
that quail in its shadow, and yet shut the gate;
that seek no parley, and in guarded room,
though small and bate, upon a clumsy loom
weave tissues gilded by the far-off day
hoped and believed in under Shadow's sway.

- J.R.R. Tolkien, *Mythopoeia*

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C.S. Lewis's character Jane Studdock realizes one day that, "The bright, narrow little life which she had proposed to live was being irremediably broken into."¹ The process of coming to and writing this dissertation has irremediably broken into the bright, narrow little life I had proposed to live. It has required me to face questions, personal and political, which have changed me. Along the way, I have received encouragement, instruction, and friendship from many. Let me name some of them here.

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¹ C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Quality Paperback Bookclub, 1997 [orig. 1945]), 81.

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean, and what does it take, to practice personal responsibility in the face of political oppression? In this dissertation, I trace the essential themes of responsibility through a critical analysis of three stories: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*, and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. No comparative study of these important works of twentieth-century political literature exists. Yet, each of these stories merits the attention of students of character and politics because all three unforgettably portray men who strive to live meaningful lives against the contrived meaning imposed on them by those in power. Importantly, my inquiry into personal responsibility through these stories is also a study in poetic imagination—a study in the relationship between imagination and reason, and the significance of that relationship for politics. In this task, I draw on C.S. Lewis's understanding of human beings as poetical animals, or story creatures, and his effort to revalidate a balanced relationship between reason and imagination.

I contend that, through their stories, Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell help us see what it means to become accountable actors in the face of political oppression. I examine three essential themes of personal responsibility: *integrity of the word*, *integrity of the human person*, and *foundations of political society*. To conclude, I reflect on the relationship between personal responsibility and the quest for justice in light of these stories. Throughout, one of my primary tasks in this study is to show how each story invites us to witness and reflect on the use and abuse of words, of persons, and of power, in a way that at once draws and enables us to become accountable actors.

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I examine the practice of personal responsibility in the face of rulers whose special intent is to destroy men's capacity to become accountable actors. I trace the essential themes of responsibility through three stories: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*, and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Each of these stories merits the attention of students of character and politics because all three unforgettably portray men who strive to live meaningful lives against the contrived meaning imposed on them by those in power. These narratives invite a dissertation in political science because they show us individuals who not only endeavor to become responsible persons, but who do so in the face of a regime designed to destroy personal responsibility. One of my primary tasks in this study is to show how each story invites us to witness and reflect on the use and abuse of words, of persons, and of power, in a way that at once draws and enables us to become accountable actors.

I come to this study with questions: What is personal responsibility? Who must give account, and for what? To what standard or authority? Is responsibility a state or a journey? How does each regime set out to vitiate its citizens' ability to become responsible persons? How do the different central characters respond, and why? These questions matter to students of politics because they compel us to reflect on the conditions, costs, and rewards of responsibility. As we participate in these stories, we journey with characters whose lives, like ours, are lived answers to these questions.

What *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* give us is an opportunity to observe particular individuals as they struggle to become responsible.

In the pages that follow I examine fundamental questions of political science through stories. It is important, I think, to remember that thinking about literature does not substitute for thinking about politics as it happens in the world. And yet, as literature illuminates and offers human experiences, it remains a distinct and indispensable medium for communication.

As I read and thought about *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* over the past year, I was humbled. These stories show attentive readers that the practice of personal responsibility is brave, daily work. Moreover, I have grown in respect for Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell. Through their craftsmanship and evocative language, these authors have made me more aware of my own inordinate rationalism and its consequences. In addition, through their literary characters, these authors give readers examples of persons who variously try, fail, and succeed at living as whole persons in the face of manipulation and abuse by political authorities. As I have journeyed with these characters, I have grown to deeply respect the story as a medium adequate to the mystery of human experience, affection, choice, and action.

SELECTION OF TEXTS

What recommends *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in particular, for a study of personal responsibility, as the subject of a

dissertation in political science? I have selected these works for their compelling treatment of personal responsibility and for their potential as aids in teaching political theory.

When I started searching for a dissertation topic, I knew I wanted one that would allow me to examine a significant theme in politics and, at the same time, better prepare me to teach undergraduates in political science. One night, my brother, who knows that one cannot—or at least, should not—attempt to think up a dissertation topic in an office chair, took me to see the 2012 film remake of *Les Misérables*. The story powerfully communicates themes of mercy and redemption, rebellion and destruction. Later that night, after the movie, I reflected on the unique potential of stories to move us to ask questions and reflect on our own lives. I wondered what texts might foster an inquiry into a fundamental question or theme in political theory in the same way that *Les Misérables* compels us to reflect on mercy and pride in the human experience more generally. I considered novels that dealt with political themes, and, as the theme of personal responsibility became increasingly important to me, eventually settled on *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *That Hideous Strength*. I had read the first two in graduate seminars in political theory, and encountered the third outside coursework around the same time.

The books at the center of this study initially attracted my attention because, intellectually and experientially, the task of personal responsibility has been a riveting theme for me. As a beginning student in political theory, I found compelling reflections on responsibility in works that belong to traditional political thought, including, for

example, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, John Adams's essays and letters, Eric Voegelin's *Hitler and the Germans*, and Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*. These students of politics made me see, in their works and by their lives, that a person's actions matter to the order of his community. At the same time, and quite unexpectedly, I gained something distinctive from the novels my political theory professor assigned. Initially, I was unsure of how to approach or interpret *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the context of courses concerned with themes such as liberty, constitutionalism, or totalitarianism. But as my courses continued, the novels served to create a world of experience that provoked and accommodated my reflections on fundamental questions in politics.

I selected *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, first, because each offers an unforgettable portrayal of individuals who struggle to become responsible in the face of a hostile regime. As I read, I noticed common themes emerge through the stories. Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell were each concerned to show some essential aspects of the journey of personal responsibility, and to point out ways in which the modern state worked to staunch men's efforts to become responsible.

Moreover, I noticed that each novel embodies its author's keen awareness of the unique capacity for improvement and destruction among men, so evident by the mid-twentieth century. These stories show us the personal and political consequences of some remarkable developments in the human situation, including the proliferation of technology, the greater authority assigned to the methods of the natural sciences, and totalitarianism.

Importantly, these twentieth-century satires of ideology represent each author's quest for order, born in revolt against the idea of utopia and experience of the unprecedented disorder that attended the attempt of totalitarianism in modernity.¹ Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell compose imaginative inquiries into the human condition and the novelty of the human situation—into the prospects for human destruction and potential, particularly in light of the development and novel applications of science and technology. The proliferation of anti-utopian literature is a mark of disillusionment with failed attempts at perfection in politics.²

Further, these authors are conscious of one another's works as responses to the contemporary political situation. Together, their novels and reviews form an intriguing conversation. Huxley and Lewis, for example, wrote specifically in response to H.G. Wells's utopian visions. As Caitrin Nicol reports, "Huxley told a friend in 1931 that he was 'writing a novel about the future—on the horror of the Wellsian Utopia and a revolt against it.'"³ In a *New York Times* review, Orville Prescott observed the common concern of Lewis and Huxley: "*That Hideous Strength* is a parable on much the same theme as was Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* – the degeneration of man which inevitably follows a gross and slavish scientific materialism which excludes all idealistic,

¹ See Eric Voegelin, "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History," in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 12 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 115-133.

² See Chad Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 11. See also, Gorman Beauchamp, "Future Words: Language and the Dystopian Novel," *STYLE* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1974), 462 and 462fn1; Mark R. Hillegas, "Dystopian Science Fiction: New Index to the Human Situation," *New Mexico Quarterly* 31 (1961), 238-249; and, most recently, M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 17.

³ Caitrin Nicol, "Brave New World at 75," *The New Atlantis*, no. 16 (Spring 2007), 43.

ethical, and religious values.”⁴ C.S. Lewis not only positioned *That Hideous Strength* in response to Wells, but also conducted a critical exchange on its aims as a satire of contemporary ideology with J.B.S. Haldane.⁵ Lewis would later review both *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.⁶

Likewise, George Orwell reviewed Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* and Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength* before he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.⁷ Once a student of Huxley’s at Eton, Orwell would accuse Huxley of riffing on *We*.⁸ Interestingly, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, unlike *Brave New World*, was in fact influenced by *We*. Zamyatin, too, wondered about similarities between *We* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Caitrin Nicol reports that “Zamyatin learned through a mutual friend that Huxley had not read *We* before he published *Brave New World*, ‘which proves,’ he said, that ‘these ideas are in the air we breathe.’”⁹ Huxley recognized Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an alternative account of the tendencies of the modern world. He defended his own diagnosis in a letter to Orwell:

⁴ Orville Prescott, review in *The New York Times*, May, 21, 1946, cited in Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis Companion and Guide* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 240.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, front matter, *That Hideous Strength*, and “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1982), 69-79.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, “George Orwell,” in *On Stories*, 101-104.

⁷ George Orwell, “The Scientists Take Over,” in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davidson (orig. *Manchester Evening News*, August 16, 1945); George Orwell, “Review of ‘WE’ by E.I. Zamyatin,” available at http://orwell.ru/library/reviews/zamyatin/english/e_zamy. Retrieved on June 14, 2013. See also, Kath Filmer, “That Hideous 1984: The Influence of C.S. Lewis’ *That Hideous Strength* on Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,” *Extrapolation* 26, no. 2 (1985), 160-169.

⁸ Jonathan Rose, “Englands His Englands,” in *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. John Rodden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 32; George Orwell, “Review of ‘WE.’”

⁹ Nicol, “Brave New World at 75,” 44.

Within the next generation I believe that the world's rulers will discover that infant conditioning and narco-hypnosis are more efficient, than clubs and prisons, and that the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging and kicking them into obedience.¹⁰

In short, it is worth re-approaching through an inquiry in political theory the novels that epitomize the concerns and conflicts that characterize Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell's exchanges.

Eventually, I became convinced that I could attempt an inquiry into the journey and practices of personal responsibility through a comparison of *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Engaging these works in the process of writing has allowed me to further explore their value as tools for teaching political theory.

This inquiry has compelled me to ask how stories work as instruments that provoke reflection and judgment. In the course of my study, I have come to understand *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as political theory in the distinct mode of narrative. There are certainly other works that illustrate the conflict between rulers and citizens over question of personal responsibility. Yet these works seem to me to depict a range of characters and regimes sufficiently broad for the present inquiry.

¹⁰ Aldous Huxley, "A Letter to George Orwell," *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. Grover Smith, Harper & Row, 1969, reprinted in *Brave New World*, Appendix, 12-15.

INTRODUCING THE AUTHORS

Brave New World, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* all portray central characters struggling to discern and become responsible to standards more enduring than themselves. These stories share common themes, but each captures those themes through distinct plots. In subsequent chapters I will examine themes that emerge in these works. For now, I want to introduce each story's author.

Aldous Huxley was born in 1894 in Surrey, England. While he is perhaps most widely known for his novel *Brave New World*, Huxley wrote extensively. His works include poetry, essays, screenplays, and a range of novels, including *The Doors of Perception*, which details his experiments with psychedelic drugs.¹¹ From the late 1930s, he lived in Los Angeles. He died on November 22, 1963, the same day as C.S. Lewis and John F. Kennedy.

Now perhaps most widely known as a children's author and a capable translator of theological ideas, for most of his life C. S. Lewis was a scholar and tutor in medieval and renaissance literature at Magdalen College, Oxford, and then at Cambridge.¹² Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1898. After his mother died in 1908, his father, Albert, sent him to English boarding schools, and then to a private tutor named William Kirkpatrick in Surrey, England. Under Kirkpatrick's effective discipline, Lewis won a scholarship in December 1916 to study classics at University College, Oxford. As a

¹¹ See Dana Sawyer, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002).

¹² Two thorough and fresh examinations of Lewis's life and thought, respectively, are Alister E. McGrath's *C. S. Lewis: A Life* (Tyndale House, 2013) and *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014). Lewis's own autobiography of his early life is *Surprised by Joy* (1955).

student and, later, as a fellow at Oxford, he won recognition for excellence in scholarship. His education in classics and literature, and contemporary concerns—including the unlimited modern state, the pretensions of scientism, and the collusion of the two—led him to comment insightfully on fundamental questions in politics. “Omnivorous” is the word Lewis’s biographers Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper use to describe his intellectual and imaginative appetite.¹³ His work as an author is similarly expansive. His books and essays include poetry, medieval and renaissance scholarship, science fiction, children’s stories, theology, devotion, literary criticism, and social criticism, as well as reflections on grief, pain, and love. Lewis died on November 22, 1963, at his home in Oxford.

Eric Blair, later known by his pen name, George Orwell, was born in 1903 in British India, where his father served in the Indian Civil Service. His mother and her children soon relocated to Oxfordshire, England. He became a novelist, essayist, BBC radio broadcaster, teacher, political writer, and social critic. Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in his last years, during a battle with the tuberculosis that finally ended his life. His biographer Bernard Crick emphasizes that the story is a parody of postwar London, aimed at detailing the implications of totalitarianism, and written in a world shaped by Hitler and Stalin.¹⁴ The work deals with themes he expounds in some of his best known and most memorable essays, including, “Politics and the English Language,”

¹³ Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 160

¹⁴ Bernard Crick, “*Nineteen Eighty-Four*: context and controversy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. John Rodden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 146-159.

and "Totalitarianism and Literature."¹⁵ Diagnosed with tuberculosis near the end of 1947, Orwell died in January 1950.

PLAN OF THE WORK

I introduce my focus on personal responsibility in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, I establish the theoretical framework that orients my approach to *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* through a study of the relationship between poetic imagination, moral meaning, and politics. Then, in the next three chapters, I examine some essential themes of personal responsibility. Chapter 3 deals with the integrity of the word, Chapter 4 with the integrity of the human person, and Chapter 5 with the foundations of political society. I conclude, in Chapter 6, with a reflection on the relationship between personal responsibility and the quest for justice. I now turn to Chapter 1, which establishes my approach to the themes and texts at the heart of this study.

¹⁵ George Orwell, *Essays*

CHAPTER 1 ACCOUNTABLE ACTORS

We are on the stage. To play well the scenes in which we are “on” concerns us much more than to guess about the scenes that follow it....[W]e do not know the play...That it has a meaning we may be sure, but we cannot see it...The playing it well is what matters infinitely.

- C.S. Lewis¹

INTRODUCTION

What is responsibility? The question concerns us. Elie Wiesel, who witnessed the best and worst of the human capacity for action and destruction, calls our attention to the theme. He writes in the 2006 preface of his memoir of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, *Night*, “When we speak of this era of evil and darkness, so close and yet so distant, ‘responsibility’ is the key word.”² Wiesel points to responsibility as the antidote to dehumanization.

In examining the meaning and practice of responsibility, I take as my point of departure Aristotle’s recognition of accountability, constraint, and the tension between these two facts of human experience. Aristotle rightly observes that responsibility rises from the distinctive human capacity to speak and act. We have the powers of speech and action, and exercise them in ways that shape our own lives and impact others. “But if we have the power to act noble or basely, and likewise the power not to act, and if such action or inaction constitutes our being good and evil, we must conclude that it

¹ C.S. Lewis, “The World’s Last Night,” *Essay Collection*

² Elie Wiesel, *Night*, xv.

depends on us whether we are decent or worthless individuals.”³ In other words, a man is accountable for his actions because he is “the source and begetter of his actions as a father is of his children.”⁴ Following Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre summarizes the point: “Human beings can be held to account for that of which they are the authors; other beings cannot.”⁵ Arendt further clarifies the stakes: “The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable.”⁶ Our character as accountable actors is key to our dignity as human beings.

Furthermore, Aristotle sees that men are constrained in their actions.⁷ Looking along with Aristotle, MacIntyre observes, “We enter upon a stage we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others.”⁸ Sometimes these constraints are so great that men cannot be blamed for their actions. “Yet,” Aristotle continues, “there are perhaps also acts which no man can possibly be compelled to do, but rather than do them he should accept the most terrible sufferings and death.”⁹

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3.5, 1113b10-15

⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3.5, 1113b15-20

⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 209

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3

⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 213

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3.1, 1110a20-30

At the outset, then, we can say that becoming responsible is learning to answer rightly, in word and in deed, to the standard to which one finds oneself accountable, within the conditions that limit human actors.

SATIRES OF THE UTOPIAN PROJECT

This is a dissertation in political science. Political science, as Aristotle observes, is essentially concerned with living well together.¹⁰ Within this broader context, I am specifically concerned with the phenomenon of personal responsibility. On my reading, *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are stories performing the work of political science. The overarching question is this: how do these stories help us to reflect on what is noble and just for individuals and their political societies? The more specific question at the heart of the present study is this: how do these stories call and enable us to take up the task of personal responsibility? I attempt a fuller response to these questions in the chapters that follow. In Chapter 2, I survey the fundamental relationship between poetic imagination, moral meaning, and politics. Then, in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I examine some essential themes of personal responsibility. For now, it is helpful to identify these novels as satirical critiques of the utopian project, and also to clarify the difference between political science and utopianism.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.2

I pause to consider the question of genre because our assumptions about what a work is intended to do shape our expectations and reading of it. While studies based in literary criticism identify works like Huxley's *Brave New World*, Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as dystopian, the designation is inadequate. To approach these stories as satires of the utopian project is to read them not as predictions of future ill, but rather as works that help us reflect on what it means to become accountable actors in the face of human corruptibility and political force.

Brave New World, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are more commonly identified and read as "dystopias."¹¹ However, I identify these stories as satires of the utopian project because the description is more accurate and fosters a more meaningful interpretation of the texts. My designation draws on Eric Voegelin's insight that these works are not "a peculiar kind of 'negative utopia,' so called," or dystopia.¹² Instead, they are "satire, in the sense of the Menippean satires." For in these stories, "[t]he whole sense of utopia is shown up as the nonsense it is."¹³

Dystopia is a derivative of the word *utopia*, coined and intended by St. Thomas More as a pun. Critically, his *Utopia* envisions a political society that is a "good place"

¹¹ Lyman Tower Sargent, *British and American Utopian Literature, 1516-1975* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979); and "Authority & Utopia: Utopianism in Political Thought," *Polity* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1982), 565-584; Hillegas, "Dystopian Science Fiction."

¹² Eric Voegelin, "In Search of the Ground," in *Published Essays 1953-1965*, CW vol. 11 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 237.

¹³ David Walsh summarizes Voegelin's insight in the descriptive term, "satires of ideology" (*After Ideology*, 32).

(*eutopia*) because its citizens do not have *superbia*, the pride of life.¹⁴ Yet More knew that a place that was “good” on these conditions could never be – or, could only be “no place” (*utopia*). In Voegelin’s analysis,

Utopia is a symbolism created by Thomas More to express the Nowhere of a society that is not marred by the *superbia vitae*, by the pride of life in the sense of I John 2:16. The author of the *Utopia* elaborates his dream of a supposedly perfect society by omitting from its structure an important sector of reality, but he knows what he has omitted and is conscious of his truncated image of reality as Nowhere.¹⁵

Yet, Voegelin continues, many contemporaries miss the pun.

In its contemporary usage by activist thinkers and nonthinkers, the meaning of the symbol has been transformed in a peculiar manner. A Utopia still means the model of a perfect society that cannot be constructed because an important sector of reality has been omitted from its construction, but its author and addicts have suspended their consciousness that it is unrealizable because of the omission.¹⁶

Following Voegelin, I understand utopia as a dream built on the lust for perfection.¹⁷ The utopian conceit rejects human limitation, denies human corruption, and aims to overcome the burdens of human existence.¹⁸ The limitations, corruption, and burdens the various utopianisms eschew may be physical, spiritual, or both. In utopia, as Voegelin describes it,

¹⁴ Cf. I John 2:16. Contrast Lyman Tower Sargent’s definition in the Introduction to the 1979 of his annotated bibliography of over 1,000 utopias, *British and American Utopian Literature, 1516-1975* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), x-xi.

¹⁵ Voegelin, “Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation,” 316.

¹⁶ Voegelin, “Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation,” 316.

¹⁷ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, in CW, vol. 5, 224.

¹⁸ Voegelin, *Science Politics, and Gnosticism*, in CW, vol. 5, 255-256, 305.

The symbols of the myth are translated into realities and aims of anthropomorphic man: The nature of man is basically good; the source of evils is to be found in institutions; organization and revolution can abolish such evils as still exist; the powers of man can create a society free from want and fear; the ideas of infinite perfectibility, of the superman, and of self-salvation make their appearance.¹⁹

Because of its ideological nature, the utopian dream is the “black magic of politics.”²⁰

What, then, is “dystopia”? John Stuart Mill makes one of the earliest recorded uses of the word in a speech before the Commons in 1868.²¹ “Regretful” of the Government’s position in a dispute, Mill declaims,

I may be permitted, as one who, in common with many of my betters, have been subjected to the charge of being Utopian, to congratulate the Government on having joined that goodly company. It is, perhaps, too complimentary to call them Utopians, they ought rather to be called dys-topians, or cacotopians. What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favor is too bad to be practicable.

Though Mill’s word has been increasingly employed, it does not adequately describe the stories of interest in this study for a few reasons. In the first place, “dystopia” lacks meaning because it derives from an intentionally nonsense word forged to name a consciously nonsense speculation. Moreover, dystopia, like utopia, is no place. Yet, in their satires, Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell censure characters and causes that represent their contemporary concerns—that is, concerns about their own times and places. To

¹⁹ Eric Voegelin, “Timaeus and Critias,” in *Order and History* vol. III, CW, vol. 16 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 242.

²⁰ Voegelin, “Timaeus and Critias,” 263; see also Germino, *Beyond Ideology*, 175-177, for a helpful summary of Voegelin’s work on the distinction between the good society and the dream utopia.

²¹ J.S. Mill, Hansard Commons Debate, March 12, 1868, available at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1868/mar/12/adjourned-debate#S3V0190P0_18680312_HOC_54. Retrieved on April 19, 2013.

these objections, we could add another—namely that, since Mill, the word is routinely ambiguously used. Typical of the unclear use of the word in contemporary literary criticism is this passage from M. Keith Booker's *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern*

Literature:

Indeed, much of the history of recent utopian thought can be read as a gradual shift from utopian to dystopian emphases, while utopian thought itself has come more and more to be seen as escapist or even reactionary. However...utopian and dystopian visions are not necessarily diametrical opposites. Not only is one man's utopia another man's dystopia, but utopian visions of an ideal society often inherently suggest a criticism of the current order of things as nonideal, while dystopian warnings of the dangers of 'bad' utopias still allow of the possibility of 'good' utopias, especially since dystopian societies are generally more or less thinly veiled refigurations of a situation that already exists in reality. Moreover, dystopian critiques of existing systems would be pointless unless a better system appear conceivable. One might, in fact, see dystopian and utopian visions as very much part of the same project.²²

On the whole, although "dystopia" is widely used, along with terms such as "inverted utopia" and "negative utopia," its nonsense derivation and ambiguous use sap its conceptual meaning and render it inadequate to the purposes of this inquiry. If we approach these stories as dystopias, we will likely consider them reports on no place, or a time outside our own. By contrast, if we approach them as stories that satirize the utopian project, they can better help us to see destructive attempts at perfection as men launch them in our own times and places.

Importantly, the term *anti-utopia* is meaningful. It denotes the response that rejects the idea and attempt of utopia. "If the utopian-dystopian form tends to construct single, fool-proof structures which solve social dilemmas, the anti-utopian

²² M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* (1994), 15

form discovers problems, raises questions, and doubts.”²³ Eugene Weber captures the anti-utopian position. He identifies utopia’s “drive to harness nature and eliminate the unpredictable” as the fundamental motive of the “heresy that man can build a paradise on earth.”²⁴ Of the response to utopia, he writes: “it is not surprising, therefore, that an age which has grown disillusioned with the omnipotence of human reason and the results of utopian presumption should produce the anti-Utopia: a literature of disillusion, no mere statement of irrationalistic denial, but deeply skeptical and aware that dreams—if pressed too far—lead either to nightmares or to frustrated waking.”²⁵ The anti-utopian authors expose the utopian dream as repulsive. They reveal ideologies as false schemes that promise but fail to satisfy the legitimate human longing for justice.

While some contemporaries urge their fellows to continue to construct utopias, in thought and in practice,²⁶ most see that the idea and attempt of utopia seems to be behind the massive destruction of the twentieth century. Gorman Beauchamp describes the “paradox of utopianism as it appears to us of [the twentieth] century—the best of motives negated by the worst of means.”²⁷ As he puts it, “Utopia, which

²³ John Huntington, “Utopian and Anti-Utopian Logic: H.G. Wells and His Successors,” *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 2 (July 1982), 124.

²⁴ Eugene Weber, “The Anti-Utopia of the Twentieth Century,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 58 (Summer 1959), 447.

²⁵ Weber, “Anti-Utopia,” 447.

²⁶ For example, Ruth Levitas, “Looking for the Blue: The Necessity of Utopia,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 3 (October 2007), 289-306; Bobby Newman, “Discriminating Utopian from Dystopian Literature: Why is *Walden Two* Considered a Dystopia?” *The Behavior Analyst* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1993), 167-175.

²⁷ Gorman Beauchamp, “Utopia and Its Discontents,” *The Midwest Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1975), 173. Unfortunately, Beauchamp’s interesting and insightful analysis is too often obscured by a fundamental Freudianism.

promised justice and happiness for all, [arrives] through its inexorable logic at a solution—the final solution—of the human dilemma: unlimited despotism.”

And yet sometimes even those who can agree with Beauchamp come to reject utopia reluctantly, or “with a guilty conscience.”²⁸ They rightly perceive that the draw of utopia substitutes for something indispensable to the human endeavor—a vision of something better. Indeed, we all have a keen sense that our lives and political societies require a vision of human action as it is meant to be, over and against what it is. This sense is misdirected, however, when its possessors fail to distinguish it from the impulse to overcome the limitations of human nature and suffering of the human condition, in pursuit of imagined perfection.

An ambivalence concerning utopia runs through utopia-dystopia studies. The practice of political theory offers resources of interpretation and analysis which can help us to evaluate utopia’s attraction. In the section that follows, I distinguish between political science, on the one hand, and utopianism, on the other.

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND UTOPIANISM

Dante Germino observes that many confuse “political theory with political doctrine and utopia construction.”²⁹ To be sure, some practitioners of contemporary political science define the task of political theory as utopia construction, and studies of utopia regularly start with the assertion that “the tradition of utopian thinking...began

²⁸ Walsh, *From Nightmare to Utopia*, Chapter 13; see also, Levitas, “Looking for the Blue.”

²⁹ Germino, *Beyond Ideology*, 5.

with Plato.”³⁰ In these accounts, “*The Republic* is generally accepted as the first utopia—a depiction, that is, of the ideal state.”

The best thinkers in the tradition of political theory maintain the tension between perfect justice, on the one hand, and the approximate justice which is attainable within the limits of the human condition, on the other; they theorize about the best regime as well as the best practicable regime. By contrast, while political theory starts with the human being situated within the limits of political reality, utopian dreaming starts with a vision of perfection abstracted from human nature and the human condition.³¹

Tocqueville offers an excellent description of utopia construction. He writes, “Above and beyond the real society itself...men’s minds gradually constructed an imaginary society in which everything appeared simple and coordinated, uniform, just and in harmony with reason.”³² The utopian imagination becomes destructive when the plan of the second, imaginary society is prosecuted over and against the first, real society.³³ Divorced from the criteria and constraints of experience and the human condition, literary politics aims at more than human perfection. Ironically, the effort to be more than human is consistently dehumanizing and destructive.

³⁰ Gorman Beauchamp, “‘The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor’: The Utopian as Sadist,” *Humanitas* 20, nos. 1 and 2 (2007), 125.

³¹ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, Book 1; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1.

³² Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime*, III.1, 147.

³³ Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime*, III.1, 147-148.

The task of political theory, then, is quite distinct from the pretensions of utopia construction.³⁴ To make this claim is not to dismiss the felt longing for a vision of better men and better political communities. On the contrary, rather than dismiss the longing for justice, the distinction between political theory and utopianism better illumines that restless desire. The distinction between political theory and utopia makes utopia's attraction more intelligible because it restores the distinction between the longing for perfect justice as the motivation for human action, on the one hand, from the utopian attempt to make men and their societies perfect, on the other.

A theory of politics begins with a theory of human nature, or a philosophical anthropology. For, "ultimately, the political problem resolves itself into the more fundamental question: what is the nature and destiny of man?"³⁵ The trouble with ideological utopias is that they start with a false image of human nature.³⁶ While each system is compelling within its own terms, both conceal the reality of the purpose of man and political society.

In the final analysis, the problem with utopia is that it conflates the search for order with the attempt to reduce or remake reality. While those who pursue utopian dreams seek escape from the burdens of existence, the task of political science is to orient and assist men in the quest for order—that is, to illuminate the nature of justice

³⁴ Cf. Voegelin, "Timaeus and Critias," 262-263.

³⁵ Hallowell, *Main Currents*, 12. Cf. James L. Wiser, "Preface," *Political Philosophy: A History of the Search for Order* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), ix-xi.

³⁶ In this connection, see John Adams, "A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law," in *The Revolutionary Writings of John Adams*, ed. C. Bradley Thompson (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 33; and Ellis Sandoz, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press), 49.

and foster its pursuit in light of, rather than in spite of, the nature and corruption of man.

That said, are not the lessons of the twentieth century more than enough to deter denizens of the twenty-first from utopian projects? As David Walsh describes it, “The age that began with the glory of the Renaissance, the bright expectations of the Enlightenment, and the energies of the scientific, industrial, and political revolutions has devolved into the horror, vacuity, and mediocrity of the twentieth century.”³⁷ The dreams that once inspired now evoke caution instead. Gorman Beauchamp adds, “As visions of systematically planned and regimented societies threatened to become realities, fantasies to be transformed into fact, chiliastic hope gave way to cautionary anxiety.”³⁸ But restraint grounded in fear is frail protection. Though frightened by what men have done, the anxious remain unwittingly open to the allure of the same false promises that empowered men to perpetrate horror, vacuity, and mediocrity in the twentieth century. Fear is not enough. Besides, people forget.

Because the desire that gives rise to utopia is ultimately a perverted form of the human desire for justice, it is not enough to expose the idea and attempt of utopia as dangerous. Political science can recognize the lust for perfection as the motive of the utopian dream. They can reject the utopian dream because they take seriously the longing for justice that, perverted, gives rise to rebellion against the purpose and limits of our nature. Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell satirize the utopian project not because they

³⁷ David Walsh, *After Ideology*, 9.

³⁸ Beauchamp, “Future Words,” 462.

want to debunk the vision and pursuit of a better men and better cities, but because they want to see that vision and pursuit better informed of the criteria, conditions, and constraints on pursuit of order amidst the dignity and corruptibility of men. In the next section, I examine the medium of their critique: satire.

SATIRE

The form and purpose of satire have been well described as follows: “A literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humor and wit to the end that human institutions or humanity may be improved. The true satirist is conscious of the frailty of institutions of man’s devising and attempts through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire a remodeling.”³⁹ C. Hugh Holman further notes that fictional narratives have served as “the vehicles for a wide-ranging and powerfully effective satiric treatment of man and his institutions.”⁴⁰ More specifically, Menippean satire is “a form named after Menippus of Gadara (3rd century BC), which emphasizes combining parody with satire and mixing several different kinds of discourse in a single work.”⁴¹

To be effective satire, a work need not necessarily provoke laughter, because satire works through ironic exposure as well as wit and humor. Jonathan Swift explains its function: “Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover

³⁹ C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), 436.

⁴⁰ Holman, *Handbook to Literature*, 437.

⁴¹ Michael F. Suarez, S.J., “Swift’s Satire and Parody,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. Christopher Fox (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 116. See also, Carter Kaplan, “The Advent of Literary Dystopia,” *Extrapolation* 40, no. 3 (1999), 200-212.

everybody's face but their own; which is the chief reason for that kind of reception it meets in the world, and that so very few are offended with it."⁴²

The novels of interest in the present study exhibit precisely the blending of modes Holman and Suarez identify as characteristic. That said, the satiric nature of these works—the use of wit, humor, irony, and parody to land a substantive critique—has sometimes eluded readers. One commentator holds, for instance, that when *Brave New World* was initially published only one critic could “see beyond the caustic laughter to the serious, even savage protest at the heart of the book.”⁴³ Occasional conspicuous misreading notwithstanding, *That Hideous Strength*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have all been recognized as satirical.⁴⁴

Like other forms of literature, satire relies for its persuasive power on an author's ability to construct a resonant world of experience. “[S]ignificant authors,” writes James Davidson, convey a “correspondence with the real world that intelligent and informed readers can recognize.”⁴⁵ He continues, “Satire might seem to be an exception, but it cannot exist without the contrast of an implicit view of reality which satire mocks by deliberate exaggeration, in fun, in the hope of reform, or in simple

⁴² Jonathan Swift, Preface, *The Battle of the Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920, and available at <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/battle.html>). Retrieved on June 25, 2013.

⁴³ Appendix, *Brave New World*, HarperPerennial, 10.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Peter J. Schakel, “The Satiric Imagination of C. S. Lewis,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1989), 129-148; Appendix, *Brave New World*, 10; Jerome Meckier, *Aldous Huxley: Satire and Structure* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969); Bernard Crick, “*Nineteen Eighty-Four*: context and controversy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. John Rodden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 146-159.

⁴⁵ James F. Davidson, “Political Science and Political Fiction,” *The American Political Science Review* 55, no. 4 (1961), 858.

malice. The humor, light or bitter depending on how much the author cares, lies in the distorted image produced when reality is highlighted by absurdities.” Ultimately, as Davidson concludes, “The world of experience is still the test, although the correspondence is of a different kind for satire than for realistic writing.”

Especially important to this dissertation is the insight that satire performs what Michael F. Suarez, S.J., describes as a “dual movement.”⁴⁶ Its destructive task is to expose its target as ridiculous. No less important, however, is its constructive task, moral education. In their satires, Lewis, Huxley, and Orwell refrain from direct instruction. They would agree with Swift, who, as Suarez writes,

suggests that the idea of satire shaming the guilty into reform ‘may be little regarded by such hardened and abandoned Natures as I have to deal with.’ Accordingly, [Swift] directs his attention to those who could be harmed by the reprobate: ‘but, next to taming or binding a Savage-Animal...the best Service you can do the Neighborhood, is to give them warning, either to arm themselves, or not come in its Way.’⁴⁷

Rather, like Swift’s satire, a shared goal of Lewis, Huxley, and Orwell’s works is “the active fostering of moral discernment, leading readers to develop their critical acumen about the workings of vice and folly—venality, ignorance, vanity, pride, dereliction of duty—in others as well as ourselves.” In advancing satire as a means of exposure and moral education, Lewis, Huxley, and Orwell rank with the company of satirists who “promote a vigilance against the stratagems of those who would abridge the liberty of

⁴⁶ Suarez, “Swift’s Satire,” 115.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Swift, cited in Suarez, “Swift’s Satire,” 115.

living in truth.”⁴⁸ Satire is a medium especially conducive to moral education, as distinct from moralizing.

Through a satiric novel, protagonist and reader together discover what happens to the individual who finds the regime’s conventions dehumanizing and challenges them. Along the way, we encounter other characters—some apparently oblivious to the situation, others committed to perpetuating the regime’s artificial standards of existence. Thrown, with each protagonist, into a world of contrived absolutes, we begin to probe for reality. In satires of ideology, as in political science, the experience of disorder spurs the quest for order.⁴⁹

LIMITATIONS OF THESE STORIES

I argue that by more accurately naming the genre of the stories we are approaching, we gain a better sense of their purpose and potential. However, Eric Voegelin and David Walsh, the insightful commentators who give us the designation “satires of ideology,” also suggest that works of this kind may be of severely limited value. While Voegelin and Walsh agree that satiric novels effectively expose ideologies, they see no further therapeutic value. In Voegelin’s words, a “very peculiar generation of scholars” effectively “criticized to pieces” the ideologies of its day. “But,” he continues,

⁴⁸ Suarez, “Swift’s Satire,” 126.

⁴⁹ See Voegelin, *Anamnesis*.

that doesn't mean that Huxley, or Orwell before he died, knew what to do next. They had known that all the utopian excrescence of their political creeds are nonsensical. But what now?⁵⁰

Like Voegelin, Walsh sees similar limits. He writes, "One need only consider the most famous and devastating satires of ideology by Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell, which can hardly be improved on as critiques, to realize that they provide us with little illumination as to how to proceed from here."⁵¹ For these political philosophers, satires can brilliantly expose perversity in people and their polities but have little more to offer and soon fall silent. Voegelin and Walsh's conclusion, however, seems premature. A critical and comparative evaluation of *That Hideous Strength*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reveals the therapeutic potential of these novels.

POTENTIAL OF THESE STORIES

These stories are of interest to students of character and politics for a number of reasons. Most fundamentally, they ask the questions basic to political science. In particular, these stories are concerned with the task of personal responsibility in tension with the demands of the regime. These stories confront us with questions about the meaning and possibility of becoming accountable actors in the face of a regime committed to remolding its citizens to be members of a stable society. Gorman Beauchamp writes with reference to satires of ideology, "The *mythos* of each of these novels centers on the question...has man an innate, instinctual nature beyond the reach

⁵⁰ Voegelin, "In Search of the Ground," 237.

⁵¹ Walsh, *After Ideology*, 32.

of culture to manipulate, or is he limitlessly plastic, to be shaped by the wishes of the state?"⁵²

Importantly, these stories are not merely incisive critiques which ultimately fall silent. Rather, they have lasting resonance because they carry out the prophetic vocation—they call us to right order. The role of the prophetic voice in the recovery of order is significant.⁵³ The prophet announces, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”⁵⁴ He calls men and women to oppose injustice and wickedness.

More than one observer has recognized the prophetic role of stories that satirize the utopian project. Chad Walsh calls these writers “the prophets of our times.”⁵⁵ He explains: “I use the word prophet in something of its biblical sense, to mean one who observes society, evaluates it in accordance with principles he considers eternal, and offers messages of warning where he sees it going astray; messages not merely of warning but predictions of the wrath to come unless society renounces its false turnings.”⁵⁶ My task in the chapters that follow is to show how Huxley, Lewis, and

⁵² Gorman Beauchamp, “Utopia and Its Discontents,” *The Midwest Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1975), 169.

⁵³ See especially Voegelin’s account of the prophetic voice and “the duty of being a human being,” in *Hitler and the Germans*, CW, vol. 31 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 200-201 and 75; and *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, in CW, vol. 5, 261: “No one is obliged to take part in the spiritual crisis of a society; on the contrary, everyone is obliged to avoid this folly and live his life in order.” See also, C.S. Lewis, “On Science Fiction,” in *On Stories*, 58.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 5:20 ESV.

⁵⁵ Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare*, 135.

⁵⁶ Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare*, 135.

Orwell deal specifically with the phenomenon of personal responsibility by highlighting experiences they present as essential to becoming accountable actors.

Crucially, these authors aim not merely to predict, but to warn and provoke response. Philip Rahv, for example, makes the point strongly in his review of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, immediately after its publication.

Hence to read this novel simply as a flat prediction of what is to come is to misread it. It is not a writ of fatalism to bind our wills... 'Wave of the future' notions are alien to Orwell. His intention, rather, is to prod the Western world into a more conscious and militant resistance to the totalitarian virus to which we are now exposed.⁵⁷

Rahv rightly receives the work as a call to right order in the present rather than simply a speculation about the future. "This novel is the best antidote to the totalitarian disease that any writer has so far produced."⁵⁸ Voegelin and Walsh fail to see that satires of the utopian project are not merely critiques, but actually invite their readers to become, more and more, the kind of people who take responsibility.

Brave New World, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have much to teach us because these treatments of personal responsibility and its essential themes help us to see our own assumptions. "[F]or one person whose armor of self-deception is penetrated by pulpit preaching," writes Chad Walsh, "there must be a dozen who

⁵⁷ Philip Rahv, "The Unfuture of Utopia," *Partisan Review* 16 (July 1949), 746. Incidentally, the study I propose differs from other well known works, such as Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, that attempt to compare Huxley and Orwell, for example, in terms of their predictive power. Rather, I share Rahv's conclusion that these works are intended not to foretell the shape of things to come, but to diagnose perversions in the present order.

⁵⁸ Rahv, "The Unfuture of Utopia," 749.

have been pierced by *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Brave New World*.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, the realm of experience each novel evokes is a forum for moral education. It has been said of Jonathan Swift, and is true of Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell, that the aim of his satire is “to educate our capacity for critical reflection on the human condition and, hence, to enlarge our capacity for humanity.”⁶⁰

APPROACHING THE TEXTS

It is helpful to say more at the outset about my intent and approach in this dissertation. This study is not a work of intellectual history. Rather, I approach these novels as works of art. They are stories that communicate significant themes of interest to students of character and politics. My aim is to mine what *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have to teach us about personal responsibility. To be sure, Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell write from their own distinctive historical moments and influential intellectual heritages. When and where these become essential to their particular stories, I try to make the connections explicit. On the whole, however, I want to examine each work as a world of its own, to see what the themes each evokes have to teach us about personal and political order in our world.

Further, this study is not a work of literary criticism. Instead, I am primarily interested in these stories for their capacity to prompt thinking and judgment about what it means to become responsible persons. Throughout, I build on the premise that

⁵⁹ Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare*, 135.

⁶⁰ Suarez, “Swift’s Satire and Parody,” 116.

Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell's stories are worlds of experience within which we can examine the nature and conditions of accountability. However, as Paul Elie observes, "ours is an age suspicious of literature's claim to speak to us directly, to suggest patterns of experience that we might read back into our lives."⁶¹ In Chapter 2, I lay out the thinking that frames my approach to these stories and their capacity to help us to think about fundamental questions in politics.

This inquiry is organized thematically. I focus on themes, rather than novels, for two reasons. The first reason is that a thematic inquiry gives primacy to the permanent things. *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *That Hideous Strength* are not great works of poetry. They are stories; and they have lasted remarkably as stories because they deal with truly great themes. Ultimately, these themes are what are significant and enduring.

The aim of the art of story, as C.S. Lewis explains in his essay, "On Stories," is to incarnate what the author is imagining.⁶² "For," as he writes elsewhere of poetry broadly, "poetry too is a little incarnation, giving body to what had been before invisible and inaudible."⁶³ In a story, the author unfolds a series of events—the plot—which "is only really a net whereby to catch something else"—namely, a theme or set of themes. The stories are not themselves fundamental, but are nets to catch themes. *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *That Hideous Strength* are examples of the effort to

⁶¹ Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), xiv.

⁶² C.S. Lewis, "On Stories," in *On Stories*, 18.

⁶³ C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, in *The Beloved Works of C.S. Lewis*, 135.

regain reality through poetic imagination. Each work tells a story, yet each evokes much more than a series of events. Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell create worlds and compel us to participate in those worlds in order to show us significant themes, not merely a series of events.

“In life and art both, as it seems to me,” Lewis continues, “we are always trying to catch in our net of successive moments something that is not successive.” We are trying to make a coherent story out of moments whose meaning is not initially coherent. He puts off, for the moment, the question “whether in real life there is any doctor who can teach us how to do it, so that at least either the meshes will become fine enough to hold the bird, or we be so changed that we can throw our nets away and follow the bird to its own country.” For now, he says, stories sometimes “very, very nearly” capture the themes we seek.

The second reason for a thematic approach has to do with the difficulty of analyzing story—of speaking discursively about an imagined world. In the world each story incarnates, as in our world, it is impossible to consider everything. To be meaningful, inquiry must be limited. Stories share in the quality by which “every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level.” As Lewis tells us, “Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise, which become truths down here in the valley; *in hac valle abstractionis*.”⁶⁴ The important thing about story is that it goes beyond reason. We cannot exhaust the meaning of any story by rational reflection. We certainly cannot scale every inch of the mountain, or even step into

⁶⁴ C.S. Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” *Essay Collection*, 141.

every stream which flows from it. But we can wade in some of the streams, and perhaps a good number of them. We can reflectively consider some of the truths refracted through each story. We can search out insights communicated in and through each story, and then compare and contrast what each author shows us. In sum, a thematic approach allows me to focus on certain images and insights, guided by the themes that seem most important for this inquiry in political science.

In the present study, as always, to approach analytically is to risk violence to the selected imaginative works. Through their stories, Lewis, Huxley, and Orwell try to incarnate worlds for us to participate in and reflect upon. These stories have the potential to unify for us the distinct experiences of *looking along* and *looking at*.⁶⁵ To discuss these stories is to attempt to play on the border of the two distinct experiences of participation and reflection, without detracting from either. We approach these works of imagination in order to better understand and evaluate the images and insights they offer. The potential reward is that reflection will make each imaginatively incarnated world more real to us. As worlds made for us to participate in and reflect upon, Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell's images present insights sufficient to feed endless conversation. It is impossible to notice all of the significant themes these stories convey. Likewise, it is impossible to exhaust the few themes highlighted here.

Part of the reason for a thematic approach, then, is that stories have the capacity to communicate innumerable themes. If our reflection here is to be rewarding, we must choose a few complementary themes and dwell on them. To approach thematically is

⁶⁵ See Chapter 2 below.

to clarify, by limiting, what I want to notice in each world. Beyond noticing and naming select themes, my bent is to attempt to evaluate what is resonant, persuasive, remarkable, unsettling, and dissatisfactory in each author's treatment.

Before I establish the specific themes that shape this study, let me describe how I attempt to conduct the thematic analysis at the heart of this essay. In the chapters that follow I try to show how these works evoke select themes through specific characters and events. For example, to explore the theme of the integrity of the human person in *Brave New World*, I examine Huxley's portrayal of different characters as they variously manifest, struggle with, or decline to pursue personal integrity. The difficult part of exegesis is tracing themes persuasively and succinctly. Beyond the basic task of exegesis, this study requires me to evaluate and, where called for, compare and critique each author's treatment of the selected themes. Throughout, my interest in each chapter's particular theme rises from my overarching interest in personal responsibility.

While the stories I engage in this dissertation are well known, they stand outside the traditional canon of Western political thought. Why, then, should we approach Aldous Huxley, C.S. Lewis, and George Orwell as serious thinkers who can help us think clearly about politics? Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell are masterful storytellers; they evoke enduring themes through their characters' actions and reflections. The questions and themes they engage are familiar to the best political theorists in our tradition. Open Aristotle or Arendt and you will find them inviting us to reflect on many of the same themes that surface when we ask what it means to be human and live well together. In fact, it is easy, upon meeting a theme in *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, or

Nineteen Eighty-Four, to turn, for example, to Aristotle or Thomas Hobbes or Eric Voegelin for further illumination. They are natural conversation partners because they share many of the same enduring questions. My purpose in this study, however, is not to put them into conversation. Explicitly or implicitly, Aristotle, Hobbes, Arendt, and Voegelin all affirm story as a mode of political thought. For the present inquiry, I want to practice the discipline of reflecting within the medium of story.

C.S. Lewis, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell work as artists and theorists. These storytellers perform the task of political theory in a different mode. By taking us into their worlds, they lead us in the basic tasks of political theory as they evoke great themes, confront us with experiences, and even enable us to act in our own world. Like discursive inquiry, their stories require us to think, to observe, reflect, and evaluate. Different from discursive inquiry, their stories offer a forum and formation that works at a level that appeals to imagination as well as reason. It is part of the present venture to approach our novelists as theorists, and their novels as works of art which are fertile for thought.

Lewis notes that, in stories, as in real life, themes tend to fade in the succession of events. He observes, for instance, that the theme or “idea of adventure fades when the day-to-day details begin to happen...Other grand ideas—home-coming, reunion with a beloved—similarly elude our grasp.”⁶⁶ My task is to show how the novels work to capture a theme—and, at moments, illuminate our own experiences. In this work, I

⁶⁶ Lewis, “On Stories,” 19.

must remain aware and humbled by the reminder that, in life and in stories both, themes are elusive things.

The interpretive and critical task before me is difficult and promising. Lewis closes his essay, "On Stories," by affirming that although the art of story is demanding, it is an art worth the effort because it sometimes succeeds in capturing significant themes for at least a few pages.⁶⁷ My central goal in the present study is to attend to the themes evoked in *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *That Hideous Strength* that are most interesting to students of character and politics. Our reward will be to better understand those themes, in our moment, through three stories widely recognized for their capacity to illuminate the human condition in an era marked by a crisis of meaning and proliferating technological capabilities. "[W]e know at once," writes Lewis of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, "that it has done things to us. We are not quite the same men."⁶⁸ These stories, too, have potential to change their readers.

TOWARD RESPONSIBILITY: THEMES

In selecting the themes of this dissertation, it would be easy to turn for justification to Aristotle, Arendt, or another voice in the traditional canon of political theory. There are, however, a few common themes that clearly emerge in Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell's accounts of the conflict between men and their regimes. I examine

⁶⁷ Lewis, "On Stories," 20.

⁶⁸ CSL, "Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*," 90.

the practice of responsibility by tracing a few themes that their narratives reveal as essential to becoming accountable actors.

One theme is the *integrity of the word*. Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell all show the corruption of language as a key instrument their imagined regimes use to hinder citizens. All three regimes foster the dissolution of language, but they do so in different ways. In Orwell's Oceania, newspeak and double think truncate a person's ability to name things as they are. In Huxley's World State, information and entertainment displace literature, reflection, and art, while pleasant euphemisms further obscure reality. At Belbury and Bracton, a web of bureaucratic words supports the pretense of meaningful communication.

At the heart of the journey to become responsible actors is every man's quest for *personal integrity*. Each regime directly attempts to prevent men from recognizing themselves, and acting, as responsible individuals. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, citizens of Oceania cannot escape the political meaning the Party imposes on everything, including the most intimate elements of their personal relationships. In *Brave New World*, the World State induces men to remain infantile by constantly imbibing base pleasures. Those in power in *That Hideous Strength* entice Mark to further their plan to stabilize, standardize, and sterilize the wider population by playing on his ambition and fear of exclusion.

Of special interest in this study are the *foundations of political society*. In all three novels, each regime asserts, and claims to legitimate, unlimited power over individuals. Yet each casts its claim to unlimited power in its own peculiar terms. The

World State promises a stable happiness. The N.I.C.E. pursues progress through a plan to eliminate the passions, limitations, and unpredictability that mark the human condition. The Party in Oceania is baldly bent on control over its citizens for the sake of control.

I examine the integrity of the word in Chapters 3, the integrity of the human person in Chapter 4, and the foundation of political community in Chapter 5. Finally, my conclusions in Chapter 6 connect the journey of personal responsibility with the quest for justice. Throughout, my analysis compares select characters from each novel as they encounter and, sometimes, embody these themes in their own choices to become or else to refuse to become responsible persons. For us, as for the characters in *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, these themes matter because they are essential to becoming responsible. I know this better than I might otherwise because Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell have helped me to see it through their stories. Importantly, when I distinguish these themes and examine them in turn, I do not mean to imply that they are, in the stories or in our lives, lessons to be picked up in succession. They are not lessons we pick up one after another, but are instead interwoven, constituent elements of the journey of personal responsibility.

It seems appropriate to ask here, why compare these three novels? Why not focus on one or two? In *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* we encounter very different regimes and very different men. The common themes which come through these narratives, the struggles each central character faces, actually heighten the contrast between these accounts. Considering the distinct ways in

which each regime attempts to cut out men's capacity to become responsible actors is illuminating and sobering. Considering the common themes as well as the points of contrast between these stories prevents us from dismissing any one of them as irrelevant to the particular time or place to which we happen to belong, and thus missing the central phenomena of the journey of personal responsibility each portrays. By examining the three stories together, we stand to gain greater insight into the different threats and aids to the journey in responsibility which Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell examine.

Before I take up each theme, I need to better understand how and why these stories provide experiences which call and enable us to become responsible. Accordingly, I now turn to examine the relationship between poetic imagination, moral meaning, and politics in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2 POETIC IMAGINATION, MORAL MEANING, AND POLITICS

Man is a poetical animal and touches nothing he does not adorn.

- C.S. Lewis¹

What is the role of poetic imagination in thinking about politics? In the previous chapter, I started an inquiry into personal responsibility using three stories that portray individuals who strive to become responsible in the face of regimes designed to undermine their efforts. I argued that *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *That Hideous Strength* are political science in narrative form. In the following chapters, I will examine a few essential themes of responsibility that come through these stories. First, however, I pause to ask how these works, as stories, foster an inquiry into personal responsibility. What interest does a student of politics have in fictional narratives? More specifically, the questions I want to explore in this chapter are these: why turn to stories? And, how do stories work?

These two questions orient my inquiry in the sections that follow. I start by examining the problem and critique of rationalism as these reach their height in the twentieth century. Next, I trace C.S. Lewis's response to rationalism through his understanding of humans as creative creatures and his effort to restore a balanced relationship between reason and imagination. Finally, I sketch the features of our experience as story-making, story-formed, and meaning-bearing creatures. I conclude

¹ C.S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?," *Essay Collection*, 15.

with a brief reflection on Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell's parallel efforts to present and provoke us to personal responsibility through their own works of poetic imagination.

DILEMMA OF INTELLECT AND IMAGINATION

Political science, as Dante Germino writes, is concerned with man "in the fullness of his experience," which includes ethical, religious, and aesthetic elements.² Political science is interested in these elements, says Germino, following Aristotle, because it is "an experiential, as opposed to an exclusively experimental, science." Crucially, works of literature have a special capacity to convey the world of human experience.³

Catherine Zuckert describes the role of literature in presenting the questions we aspire to illuminate through political science. "The questions that led political scientists to look to works of art for enlightenment concern the aspects of human life that are most difficult, if not impossible, to study and observe externally or objectively—the attitudes, emotions, and opinions that shape and are shaped by people's circumstances, especially their political circumstances."⁴ She continues, "Chief among the issues that escape the positivist paradigm and attract political scientists to the study of literature have been

² Germino, *Beyond Ideology*, 6.

³ On literature and politics, see also: Maureen Whitebrook, "Only Connect: Politics and Literature 10 Years Later, 1982-92," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 26, no. 2 (Jun. 1993), 257-262; Jean Bethke Elstain, "Stories and Political Life," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28, no. 2 (Jun. 1995), 196-197; and, Wilson Carey McWilliams, "Poetry, Politics, and the Comic Spirit," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28, no. 2 (Jun. 1995), 197-200.

⁴ Catherine Zuckert, "Why Political Scientists Want to Study Literature," *PS* (1995), 189.

the moral dimensions of politics.” As Zuckert points out, the questions that interest students of politics are complex and require an adequate mode of presentation.

The difficulty, however, as Zuckert rightly names it, is that rationalism, the dominant paradigm in contemporary studies of politics, constrains many people in their efforts to think about politics. In order to explain how stories work, why they matter, and how they aid a study in personal responsibility, I need to introduce the problem of rationalism and its consequences for imagination, stories, moral experiences, and politics. To make this introduction, I draw on Max Weber’s insightful evaluation in his 1918 speech, “Science as a Vocation.”⁵

Rationalism is the name for the movement that first divorces intellect and imagination, and then elevates reason and denies imagination. Rationalism tempts us to believe that we can know all there is to know by means of instrumental reason—and, worse, that what we can know by instrumental reason is all there is to know.⁶ In Max Weber’s account, rationalism affirms that we “can, in principle, master all things by calculation.”⁷ Nothing remains mysterious. Weber calls the result *disenchantment*.

Rationalism rises from an inordinate desire for knowledge, and attracts those who long for certain knowledge. Critically, however, rationalism promises more than reason can competently deliver. It guarantees reliable and effective knowledge through

⁵ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation.” From H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Translated and edited), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, pp. 129-156, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946 [orig. 1919]. Available at <http://mail.www.anthropos-lab.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Weber-Science-as-a-Vocation.pdf>. Retrieved on July 29, 2014.

⁶ See also, Voegelin, *New Science of Politics*.

⁷ Weber, “Science,” 7.

a science “free from presuppositions.”⁸ Yet, as Weber explains, all science—all our attempts to know—is built on presuppositions embodied in “our ultimate position towards life.”⁹ Natural science, for example, “gives us an answer to the question of what we must do if we wish to master life technically. It leaves quite aside, or assumes for its purposes, whether we should and do wish to master life technically and whether it ultimately makes sense to do so.”¹⁰

In other words, Weber contends that science tells us what to do to achieve particular goals—it answers the question, “How?” But science and technology cannot answer the orienting questions, “Does it make sense?” and “Should we?” These questions address meaning and ethics, and they require special attention. Rationalism, meanwhile, quietly assures us that we do not need to attend to these questions because we already have the answers. Consequently, we answer too often these questions functionally, by our practices, but without reflection.

The basic presupposition of any scientific endeavor is our conviction that what the inquiry may yield is worth knowing, within—and this is key—*within* a broader vision of the purpose of human life.¹¹ When we divorce and distort intellect and imagination,

⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹ Cf. Husserl, Vienna Lecture “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity; or, the ‘Vienna Lecture,’” (online at http://www.users.cloud9.net/~bradmcc/husserl_philcris.html, orig. 1935. Retrieved on May 9, 2012; Weber, Science

we forget this presupposition. Simply put, we forget that all our sciences, including natural science and politics, build on the stories we tell about the point of human life.

The dilemma of intellect and imagination Weber and some of his contemporaries identify has consequences that matter to our everyday lives, to political science, and to the present study. Perniciously, rationalism prevents us from asking some of the most significant questions of ethics and politics. Our diligence or failure in asking those questions shapes all our endeavors. The questions of meaning and ethics are old, but, now more than ever, they compel our attention.¹²

These questions of meaning and ethics matter because of key developments—namely, the expanding development and use of biotechnologies—that *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* each treat. These works remain resonant, in part, because their authors see that the realm of human endeavor is set to expand exponentially as men apply technologies to human life. We can do more now than ever. In 2009, Nick Bostrom and Julian Savulescu reported from the University of Oxford: “Human enhancement has moved from the realm of science fiction to that of practical ethics. There are now effective physical, cognitive, mood, cosmetic, and sexual enhancers.”¹³ Bostrom and Savulescu say innovations within this century will “provide

¹² Eric Cohen, “Bioethics in Wartime,” *The New Atlantis*, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 23-33.

¹³ Nick Bostrom and Julian Savulescu, “Introduction: Human Enhancement Ethics: The State of the Debate,” in Nick Bostrom and Julian Savulescu, eds. *Human Enhancement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 18.

the opportunity fundamentally to change the human condition.” They conclude: “Our fate is, to a greater degree than ever before in human history, in our own hands.”¹⁴

The biotech conversation, in particular, matters because now as never before our answers provoke exponential consequences. As we apply new technologies to change how we are born, live, and die, we recast the human situation. Following C.S. Lewis, Eric Cohen rightly says our plans become “more plausible and more irreversible.”¹⁵ The upshot is that the rationalism that blinds men to questions of meaning and ethics bears consequences for our daily lives.

Rationalism is a particular problem for the study of politics because politics, as Aristotle observes, is founded on ethics, which in turn depends on meaning. More simply, the study of politics is essentially concerned with the question, “What does it mean to live well together?” which in turn depends on two questions: “What does it mean to live well?” and “What does it mean to be human?” Because rationalism blinds us to questions of moral meaning, it undermines any robust study of politics at the outset. In short, as Zuckert writes, rationalism hinders contemporary studies of politics because it blinds us to the most significant dimensions of politics.

In the twentieth century, certain theorists recognized rationalism and started to search for a more adequate mode of asking questions about human experience and the world.

¹⁴ Bostrom and Savulescu, *Human Enhancement*, 20-21.

¹⁵ Cohen, “Bioethics in Wartime,” 28.

SEARCH FOR AN ADEQUATE MODE OF INQUIRY

Some theorists who critique rationalism in the twentieth century include Edmund Husserl, Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, Eric Voegelin, and Alasdair MacIntyre. These thinkers recognize rationalism as the dominant mode of discourse in the Western world. In the main, they critique it as inadequate for considering questions of moral meaning and politics. In response, each theorist searches for a mode of thought and expression that is more adequate for observing and evaluating human experience.

Arendt and MacIntyre, in particular, adopt the language of narrative. They describe the structure of human life in terms of story, and understand persons as agents capable of giving an intelligible account of their actions. Arendt writes, for example:

Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his own life story. In other words, the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and sufferer, but nobody is the author.¹⁶

Similarly, MacIntyre affirms that we are not autonomous authors of our stories. He writes,

I spoke earlier of the agent as not only an actor, but an author. Now I must emphasize that what the agent is able to do and say intelligibly as an actor is deeply affected by the fact that we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

¹⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 213.

Weber and Voegelin, in turn, exhort their audiences to turn to literature. For example, Weber encourages us to pick up Tolstoy.¹⁸ When Voegelin finds Albert Camus undertaking the quest for meaning through novels, he identifies Camus' effort as a "meditation in the medium of a myth."¹⁹ He observes that myth is distinctively appropriate for considering human experience, especially political questions—questions of right order in persons and their communities. Accordingly, Voegelin directs young students of politics not to professional political science, but to contemporary literary works, and to scholarship on myths, ethnic cultures, philology, history, and religion.²⁰ *In Search of Order*, the final volume of Voegelin's lifework, *Order and History*, is a meditative inquiry into the narrative structure of reality.

These scholars' appeal to narrative and myth matters to us because they revive a language and a way of seeing human action that recover the questions of moral meaning to which rationalism remains blind. They ably use the language of narrative and describe humans as accountable actors.

Though significant, their appeal to narrative remains limited. On the whole, their critiques of rationalism are penetrating but incomplete. To show how their response to rationalism is unfinished, and with what consequence, I turn to C. S. Lewis, a thinker not usually associated with the canon of Western political thought. Lewis' stories and scholarship can help illuminate the relationship between poetic imagination, meaning,

¹⁸ Weber, "Science."

¹⁹ Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 190

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 190-193

and politics. Like these political theorists, Lewis diagnoses the crisis of intellect. But, perhaps better than they do, he sees that a crisis of intellect is equally a crisis of imagination. He understands that any adequate response to rationalism must include not only a critique of rationalism, but also a renewal of imagination. In turn, his theoretical work and poetic craftsmanship evidence and contribute to a restoration of a balanced relationship between intellect and imagination.

Lewis contends with rationalism—first in his own intellectual life and, later, in conversation with those who confine knowledge of the world to what we can know by intellect alone. In certain of his essays and stories, he shows why rationalism fails those it attracts. While he acknowledges the longing for certitude that drives the move to elevate reason and dismiss imagination, Lewis advocates a healthy relationship between reason and imagination as the more satisfactory path to knowledge. He goes further to show why, in our quest for knowledge, imagination is as important as intellect. Perhaps most significantly, his insights into the role of imagination in thinking about the moral dimensions of our experience rise from his understanding of humans as poetical animals, to which I now turn.

HUMAN BEINGS AS POETICAL ANIMALS

C. S. Lewis is exemplary in his effort to revalidate our capacity and practice of asking questions that draw out the moral dimensions of our experience. What frames the present study is Lewis's profound understanding of human beings as poetical animals, a concept I elaborate below. In short, it is a view of human beings as story-

making, story-formed, and meaning-bearing creatures. Readers acquainted with Lewis as a Christian apologist or author of children’s literature may be surprised by his contribution to the conversation on the nature of knowledge. The conversation on knowledge, or epistemology, reaches back to the pre-Socratics and Plato, finds definite development in Aristotle, and is a central, though often implicit, theme in western thought throughout the tradition.²¹ At issue in this debate, where Lewis takes it up in his moment, is the nature of man. The question he engages: is man essentially a rational creature—a creature whose approach to the world is essentially one of information gaining and problem solving, or is he instead essentially a creative creature—a creature for whom true knowledge depends on both imagination and reason?

Before I examine C.S. Lewis’s response to the question, let me say why I think his contribution matters. I want to draw on Lewis’s insights because his life is formed by his effort to recover poetic imagination against the existential and intellectual threats that characterize the age of totalitarianism and rationalism. His work resonates with our experiences as people who hunger for a universal story, in an age where individuals are cynical toward stories and universals.²² Importantly, his thoughts on the dilemma of intellect and imagination emerge through his personal quest for coherence and

²¹ Indeed, Lewis and his friends Owen Barfield and J.R.R. Tolkien are all aware that the conversation they participate in evokes themes presented in key myths of the Genesis account—in particular, the relationship between the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, and the Tower of Babel. Barfield, for example, comments: “Only when poesy, who is herself alive, looks backward, does she see at a glance how much younger is the Tree of Knowledge than the Tree of Life” (Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 90).

²² Amidst a vast literature on the loss of story in the face of rationalism, see Robert W. Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story,” *First Things*, October 1993.

meaning. While Lewis joins many others in the effort to restore imagination and intellect, his work is distinctive for its clarity and common sense language.²³ Finally, like Huxley and Orwell, Lewis is an author of stories. He writes as a philosopher and teacher, and, crucially, as a master craftsman. In his own description, “The imaginative man in me is older, more continuously operative, and in that sense more basic than either the religious writer or the critic.”²⁴

The young C. S. Lewis sought to reconcile discursive reason, on the one hand, and poetic imagination, on the other, within himself. He had imbibed the Enlightenment narrative, in which primitive myth gives way to science and reason.²⁵ Lewis describes the conflict of intellect and imagination that characterized his youth in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*: “The two hemispheres of my mind were in sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other, a glib and shallow ‘rationalism.’ Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless.”²⁶ Lewis wonders about the conflict of reason and imagination in his poem, “Reason,” written in the late 1920s or early 1930s.²⁷ There he asks, “Who [will] make imagination’s dim exploring touch/Ever

²³ Compare Barfield’s retrospection on Lewis’s attempt to revalidate language through his scholarship and craftsmanship, “Lewis, Truth, and Imagination,” in *Owen Barfield on C.S. Lewis* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 103

²⁴ Undated letter to the Milton Society of America, which on 28 December 1954 held “A Milton Evening in Honor of Douglas Bush and C. S. Lewis,” in *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 259-260.

²⁵ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 56.

²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 95.

²⁷ The poem, which Barfield thought should be titled “Reason and Imagination,” is reprinted in *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, 117.

report the same as intellectual sight?” Malcolm Guite notes that the poem anticipates a concord between reason and imagination that Lewis started to articulate not long after he penned the piece.²⁸

In the 1930s, C.S. Lewis comes to see humans as essentially creative creatures, and, accordingly, to view reason and imagination as interdependent, complementary modes of knowledge. He discovers that, in reality, intellect and imagination are opposed not to one another, but to the rationalism that damages both. To be clear, Lewis is a *rationalist*—that is, he values reason—but he rejects *rationalism*, a strict reliance on reason as an adequate means to know all truth.

How does the concord of reason and poetic imagination develop for Lewis? To understand how he comes to reconcile these two ways of knowing, we must make a brief survey of his theory of knowledge. Lewis forges and refines his thoughts on man as a poetical animal in conversation with friends in his literary circle, the Inklings. Two of his friends in particular, Owen Barfield and J.R.R. Tolkien, influence his understanding of the kinds of creatures we are and how we acquire true knowledge. Barfield and Tolkien’s concern, which Lewis came to share, is “that the right balance should be maintained between the poetic and rational principles, otherwise truth is lost.”²⁹

Owen Barfield’s theories of knowledge and language deeply appealed to both Lewis and Tolkien. He published *Poetic Diction* in 1928 and dedicated the book to

²⁸ Malcolm Guite, *Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 307.

²⁹ Clive Tolley, “Tolkien’s ‘Essay on Man,’: a look at Mythopoeia,” *Chesterton Review* vol. 28 (February/May 2002), 92.

Lewis.³⁰ In turn, we find J.R.R. Tolkien's most distinctive statements on how humans know and name reality in his poem, *Mythopoeia*, and his essay, *On Fairy Stories*.³¹ Both works date to around 1931 and deal with the nature of imagination, reason, and language. Tolkien addresses his *Mythopoeia* to C. S. Lewis, "one who said that myths were lies and therefore worthless, even though breathed through silver."³² Clive Tolley elaborates the connection between Barfield and Tolkien's works in his 2002 essay, "Tolkien's 'Essay on Man': a look at *Mythopoeia*."³³ We see Barfield and Tolkien's subsequent influence on Lewis in the essays collected in *On Stories*, as well as "Myth Became Fact" and "Meditation in a Toolshed." In addition to these, his essay from the 1930s entitled "Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare," is especially significant.³⁴

In their conversations and writings, Lewis and his friends attempt to address what they saw as an epistemological rupture with real world consequences. In Malcolm Guite's description,

[Lewis and Barfield's] great project, together with some of the other members of the Inklings, notably Tolkien and Charles Williams, was to heal the widening split between outer and inner, rational and imaginative, microcosm and macrocosm. They aimed to do so by using the power of poetic language in verse and prose to

³⁰ Ibid., 94, 87.

³¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," in *Tree and Leaf*, ca. 1931.

³² Tolkien, "Mythopoeia."

³³ Tolley, "Tolkien's 'Essay,'" 79-95.

³⁴ "Bluspels" dates to the late 1930s, according to Hooper, *Companion and Guide*, 570. The essay appears in *Rehabilitations and Other Essays*, 1939, and again in *Selected Literary Essays*, 1969. Page numbers here refer to SLE.

effect a “felt change of consciousness,” to heighten and deepen our awareness by re-enchanting the disenchanting, by re-mythologizing a demythologized world.³⁵

In short, Lewis and his friends endeavor to heal the divorce and consequent mutual distortion of reason and imagination.

Before proceeding here, I should note that Lewis, together with Barfield and Tolkien, confronts us with ideas of human being and knowledge which are, as Clive Tolley writes of Barfield’s ideas, “difficult to accommodate...in much of the western philosophical tradition.”³⁶ His ideas challenge conventional western thought, as Tolley continues, because “they require us to accept that truth may be arrived at by *other means than mere reasoning*, which has been the basic tenet of that philosophical tradition, in particular of the positivism which gave rise to modern science and *materialism*.”³⁷

Certain of Barfield’s ideas became key points in the conversation that developed between Barfield, Tolkien, and Lewis. It is, therefore, helpful to focus on Barfield’s work for a moment. His *Poetic Diction* is a complex study of knowledge, myth, and consciousness. The point of departure, for Barfield, is the idea that Nature has instilled original meanings in reality. He writes, “Men do not *invent* those mysterious relations between separate external objects, and between objects and feelings and ideas, which

³⁵ Guite, *Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 306.

³⁶ Tolley, “Tolkien’s ‘Essay,’” 89.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Italics in original. If Tolley abridges the lines between reason, positivism, modern science, and materialism, he rightly warns that Lewis, Barfield, and Tolkien offer a view of knowledge discounted by the basic prejudices which dominate contemporary opinions of knowledge. See Husserl, *Vienna Lecture*, and Voegelin, *NSP and SPG*

it is the function of poetry to reveal. These relations exist independently, not indeed of Thought, but of any individual thinker.”³⁸

Barfield holds, as Tolley summarizes, “that mankind has undergone a development—one might say evolution—of consciousness from one in which certain things are perceived as one whole to one in which they are conceived as separate or at most related entities, e.g. the original unitary concept of breath-wind-spirit becomes split into three or more concepts we recognize.”³⁹ This development of consciousness, argues Barfield, is reflected in the development of language.

The language of primitive men reports to them direct perceptual experience. The speaker has observed a unity, and is not therefore himself conscious of *relation*. But we, in the development of consciousness, have lost the power to see this one as one. Our sophistication, like Odin’s, has cost us an eye; and now it is the language of the poets, in so far as they create true metaphors, which must *restore* this unity conceptually, after it has been lost from perception.⁴⁰

In short, he concludes, it is by imagination that we see.⁴¹ Accordingly, the poet’s task is to once again see, and to make others see, the world.⁴²

On Barfield’s account, early “myths, which represent the earliest meanings, were not the arbitrary creation of ‘poets,’ but the natural expression of man’s being and consciousness at the time. These primary ‘meanings’ were *given*, as it were, by Nature, but the very condition of their being given was that they could not at the same time be

³⁸ Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 86.

³⁹ Tolley, “Tolkien’s ‘Essay,’” 87.

⁴⁰ Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 86-87.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 87, 28

⁴² *Ibid.*, 92

apprehended in full consciousness; they could not be *known*, but only experienced or lived.”⁴³ With the development of consciousness, Barfield continues, it becomes the poet’s task to recover original meaning by making metaphors: “In place of the simple, given *meaning*, we find the *metaphor*—a real creation of the individual—though, in so far as it is true, it is only re-creating, registering as *thought*, one of those eternal facts which may already have been experienced in perception.”⁴⁴

Barfield argues that the denial of imagination bears great consequences for thought and practice. In his 1951 Preface to the Second Edition, he further develops his basic account of the cost of rationalism as a self-deception and distortion of reality. He describes men who reject imagination as paralyzed. Poisoned by scientism, their “habit of mind” is to “assume that man is a detached observer of a world devoid of human spirit and ‘going on by itself.’ Within such a framework imagination can be no more than a kind of pretending, and it is as such that it is presented.”⁴⁵ Barfield continues, with a call to attention:

No doubt the experience of the outside world as something ‘which goes on by itself,’ and appears to have lost all connection with human imagination, was burnt into many modern poets by the combined violence and passivity of trench warfare; and today the objectized nothing, which scientism supposes at the base of the phenomenal world, is taking shape as the spectre of nuclear fission and scientific warfare on a world-wide scale. Some ‘habit of mind’! the empiricist may well object, with a chuckle; and it is no part of my case that push-and-pull empiricism is weak or ineffectual, only that it is, like other giants, ignorant. The possibility of man's avoiding self-destruction depends on his realizing before it's

⁴³ Ibid., 102

⁴⁴ Ibid., 103

⁴⁵ Ibid., 35

too late that what he let loose over Hiroshima, after fiddling with its exterior for three centuries like a mechanical toy, was the forces of his own unconscious mind.⁴⁶

With a tone of admonition, Barfield remarks on the man who possesses overly rationalistic habits of thought: “There was a time when...he still regarded himself as responsible, and thought he might do something to change them [i.e., these habits].”⁴⁷

Owen Barfield’s effort to provoke individuals to personal responsibility starts in his challenge to western rationalism. To summarize, he holds that Nature gives primary meanings, and that those meanings are accessible through the complementary working of logos and imagination. He then traces the implications of habits formed by rationalism, and, against these habits, urges his readers to reconsider their suppositions regarding knowledge for the sake of recovering the integrity required for responsible action.

What Owen Barfield says in *Poetic Diction*, J.R.R. Tolkien says in his poem *Mythopoeia*. Of the connection between Barfield and Tolkien’s works Clive Tolley writes, “It would not be stretching things too far to say that *Mythopoeia* is a poetic version of the main arguments of *Poetic Diction*.”⁴⁸ Most fundamentally, “For Tolkien”—as for Barfield—“man is not essentially a scientific beast, but a creative

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35-36

⁴⁷ Ibid., 38

⁴⁸ Tolley, “Tolkien’s ‘Essay,’” 87. Tolley conducts an illuminating close comparison of *Mythopoeia* and *Poetic Diction*, and places both in the context of a broader conversation between Alexander Pope and Tolkien.

one.”⁴⁹ In *Mythopoeia*, Tolkien echoes Barfield’s theory of language. He also presents a similar critique of the rationalism that distorts both reason and imagination, and likewise highlights its consequences for industrialization and violence. Importantly, Tolkien further develops in this poem a concept that becomes particularly important to Lewis: human being as subcreator, an idea to which I will return below.

Barfield and Tolkien’s understanding of humans as creative creatures influenced C.S. Lewis’s reconception of the relationship between intellect and imagination. The maturing Lewis’s understanding of how humans know and speak about the world informs his subsequent essays on intellect, imagination, and story, as well as his potent study, *The Abolition of Man*. Let’s survey the basic account of human knowledge and language Lewis presents in “Bluspels and Flalansferes.”

In this essay, Lewis responds to the contention that metaphorical language is inadequate for securing real knowledge and, conversely, that language free from metaphor delivers more certain knowledge. He cites Barfield’s response to two authors who claimed that “it is impossible thus to handle a scientific matter in metaphorical terms.”⁵⁰ “[These authors] had forgotten, [Barfield] complained, that all language has a figurative origin and that the ‘scientific’ terms on which they piqued themselves—words like *organism*, *stimulus*, *reference*—were not miraculously exempt.”⁵¹ Lewis quotes Barfield’s conclusion: “As a result, they are absolutely rigid under the spell of those

⁴⁹ Ibid., 82

⁵⁰ C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London, 1923), 4-5, quoted in Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 251.

⁵¹ Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 251.

verbal ghosts of the physical sciences, which today make up practically the whole meaning-system of so many European minds.”⁵² The difficulty, Lewis goes on to say, for the man who claims to move from poetic or metaphorical language to scientific language instead, is that he forgets that “when he deserted metaphor for mathematics, he did not really pass from symbol to symbolized, but only from one set of symbols to another.”⁵³

We depend upon imagination and metaphor more than we usually appreciate. Throughout “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” Lewis compellingly highlights the fact of our constant and often unacknowledged recourse to imagination. The moment we start to think of “causes, relations, of mental states or acts,” he observes, “we become incurably metaphorical.”⁵⁴ We cannot think beyond particular objects without metaphor: “At the very humblest we must speak of things in the plural; we must point not only to isolated sensations, but to groups and classes of sensations; and the universal latent in every group and every plural inflection cannot be thought without metaphor. Thus far beyond the security of literal meaning all of us, we may be sure, are going to be driven by our daily needs; indeed, not to go thus far would be to abandon reason itself.”⁵⁵ Lewis here advances the insight that it is by imagination that we see the world. Reason, in turn, depends upon and works in concert with imagination. Reason, then, compels us to

⁵² Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 134.

⁵³ Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 261.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

make use of imagination. The problem with rationalism, then, in Lewis's diagnosis, is that it hinders our response to reason's requirement that we rely on imagination as well.

On the whole, Lewis contends that metaphor is no impediment to, but is, quite the opposite, essential to knowledge. In reaching this conclusion, Lewis remains a rationalist: he maintains that we arrive at truth by use of reason. But he rejects rationalism: he denies that we can live by reason alone. Here we come to the heart, for Lewis, of the relationship of reason and imagination:

I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but the condition.⁵⁶

The key point is that, for Lewis, to maintain a healthy balance between intellect and imagination, we must acknowledge their complementary roles. He values reason as our means of coming to truth. We gain truth when we think and speak rightly about the world as it is. We cannot, however, think or speak rightly about the reality as it is until we first see it—and we see by imagination. In other words, meaning comes through imagination: imagination enables us to see the world as it is. Imagination and metaphor complement and supply reason in the quest for truth.

Before I further examine Lewis's revaluation of imagination, I need to address a fundamental question he raises in his account of knowledge. In his 2002 essay, Clive Tolley points out an open question in Barfield's theory of knowledge and language, which Lewis's theory similarly invites. Tolley asks, "How do we know, when confronted

⁵⁶ Ibid., 265.

by a new and perhaps striking metaphor, that a true unitary concept is being presented to us, rather than just a clever juxtaposition of concepts by the poet?"⁵⁷ Lewis sees the question coming and addresses it in the closing lines of "Bluspels and Flalansferes":

I said at the outset that the truth we won by metaphor could not be greater than the truth of the metaphor itself; and we have seen since that all our truth, or all but a few fragments, is won by metaphor. And thence, I confess, it does follow that if our thinking is ever true, then the metaphors by which we think must have been good metaphors. It does follow that if those original equations between good and light, or evil and dark, between breath and soul and all the others, were from the beginning arbitrary and fanciful—if there is not, in fact, a kind of psycho-physical parallelism (or more) in the universe—then all our thinking is nonsensical. But we cannot, without contradiction, believe it to be nonsensical. And so, admittedly, the view I have taken has metaphysical implications. But so has every view.⁵⁸

To close this section, I want to make a connection between Lewis's understanding of humans as poetical animals and the thesis of his later 1945 essay, *The Abolition of Man*. The connection is this: the reason, at bare minimum, that it matters that we recognize humans as poetical animals is that, unless we do so, we are subject to a rationalism that easily leads us to destruction. Tolley writes of Tolkien—and the same is emphatically true of Lewis—that, while he was not hostile to scientific investigation, "he clearly felt that the pursuit of knowledge outside a realization of the true nature of man was not merely limited but leads to damnation."⁵⁹ As it discredits imagination, rationalism distorts knowledge into scientism and language into literalism. Ultimately, rationalism is the skewed and blinding view of man as a creature whose knowledge of

⁵⁷ Tolley, "Tolkien's 'Essay,'" 93.

⁵⁸ Lewis, "Bluspels and Flalansferes," 265.

⁵⁹ Tolley, "Tolkien's 'Essay,'" 82.

nature enables him to conquer nature. It promises a fully planned and conditioned world. Yet, as Lewis writes, “If the fully planned and conditioned world...comes into existence, Nature will be troubled no more by the restive species that rose in revolt against her so many millions of years ago, will be vexed no longer by its chatter of truth and mercy and beauty and happiness.”⁶⁰ Rationalism ends in the abolition of man because it blinds us to our true nature, and lures us into a project that ultimately silences all our chatter of meaning. The reign of reason alone promises the conquest of nature, but ends in the conquest of man.

Critically, C.S. Lewis warns against rationalism and revalidates poetic imagination because he sees more clearly than most our true nature: “Man is a poetical animal and touches nothing he does not adorn.”⁶¹ One of the chief marks of our character as poetical animals is our language. Try to speak without metaphor. “The reason why we don’t is that we can’t,” Lewis writes. “We can make our language duller; we cannot make it less metaphorical. We can make the pictures more prosaic; we cannot be less pictorial.”⁶² We cannot abandon poetic imagination and still think accurately because “all language about things other than physical objects is necessarily metaphorical.” Lewis sees that we cannot comprehend or communicate meaning if we deny, as rationalism does, that we are poetical animals. But if we aim to avoid metaphor and mystery—to trust discursive reason alone and discredit all else—we blind ourselves to

⁶⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 68.

⁶¹ Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?,” *Essay Collection*, 15.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18

the very realities that make life worth living. We distort our view of reality and separate ourselves from the meaning we desire. We cut off our access to the most significant dimensions of politics.

So far, then, C.S. Lewis's understanding of human beings as creative creatures helps us respond to the first question at the outset of this chapter: why turn to stories? By understanding our nature as poetical animals, we start to see more clearly the special potential of stories. Stories have the potential to be a particularly resonant form of communication because we are more than solely scientific creatures and they appeal to our imaginative as well as rational capacities.

REVALIDATING IMAGINATION

Imagination, as Lewis and his friends argue, is indispensable in our efforts to engage fundamental questions of meaning, ethics, and politics. In the previous section, I surveyed Lewis's view of human beings as poetical animals in order to better understand why story can serve as an especially significant form of communication. My purpose in this section and the next is to further probe this chapter's second question: how do stories work? To do this, I focus on Lewis's critique of rationalism and, more important still, his revalidation of imagination.

In what follows, I draw on a few essays in which Lewis shows how rationalism distorts our knowledge of the world. In these essays, Lewis confronts dominant contemporary opinions about how we know. His purpose is to expose the lust for certitude as destructive, and yet affirm our legitimate longing for meaning and

coherence. Rationalism, he argues, is an attempt to satisfy our over-desire for certain knowledge, to the detriment of legitimate means of fulfilling our rightful longing for significance and truth. Ultimately, rationalism is a cruelly self-defeating pretension. It denies the balance of imaginative and rational powers that enable us to comprehend and communicate the significance of our experiences, from service, to worship, to nuptial embrace, to learning, work, play, and more.⁶³

Lewis affirms the legitimate longing for knowledge that might motivate people to rationalism. Yet, he argues, the move to rationalism cannot deliver the certitude it promises and, worse, actually hinders our access to the knowledge we can have.

One of Lewis's most concise and clear attempts to address the problem of rationalism is his essay, "Meditation in a Toolshed." To start, he makes a basic distinction between knowledge by observation and knowledge by participation. Lewis illustrates the difference between the two by reflecting on his own experience of a sunbeam. "I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through a crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam."⁶⁴ He describes two distinct experiences of the beam, *looking at* and *looking along*. First, he looked at the sunbeam. "From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place."⁶⁵ Then, he moved closer and looked along the beam, through the crack at the top of the door, to the green leaves and, much further above, up to the sun.

⁶³ See C.S. Lewis, "Priestesses in the Church," *God in the Dock* (1948), 234, quoted below.

⁶⁴ C.S. Lewis, "Meditation in a Toolshed," *God in the Dock*, 212.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

Lewis makes his experience of the sunbeam a metaphor to describe two different modes of knowledge. In many situations—for example, being in love, viewing a work of art, washing clothes, or having a tooth pulled—one can observe from the outside, or else know from the inside by performing these actions or participating in these experiences oneself. Recognizing these two ways of knowing provokes us to ask, “Which is the ‘true’ or ‘valid’ experience? Which tells you the most about the thing?”⁶⁶

Since the start of the twentieth century, Lewis contends, people in the West credit *looking at* over *looking along*. “It has even come to be taken for granted that the external account of a thing somehow refutes or ‘debunks’ the account given from the inside.”⁶⁷ He acknowledges that, in a way, it makes sense to privilege the external account. Lewis asks us to consider, for instance, the lover who finds his beloved to be not quite what he first thought, or people who dance to bring rain, crops, and babies but remain unaware that they are not the agents they think themselves. It is easy to conclude that the knowledge we gain by looking at, with reflective distance, is superior to the knowledge we gain by participating in an event or exchange. Lewis asks, “Having been so often deceived by looking along, are we not well advised to trust only to looking at? —in fact to discount all these inside experiences?”⁶⁸ His answer: “Well, no.”

He asks us to think about why we are tempted to distrust the knowledge we gain by looking along. We want to dismiss it, he affirms, because we aim to think more

⁶⁶ Ibid., 213.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 214

accurately. There are, however, some things you can only truly know by experience. If we discount all we learn by looking along, we cut off our access to these things. You cannot think more accurately if you don't have something to think about. Lewis writes,

It is perfectly easy to go on all your life giving explanations of religion, love, morality, honor, and the like, without having been inside any of them. And if you do that, you are simply playing with counters. You go on explaining a thing without knowing what it is. That is why a great deal of contemporary thought is, strictly speaking, thought about nothing—all the apparatus of thought busily working in a vacuum.⁶⁹

In sum, rationalism condemns those it attracts to deal in counterfeit tokens, but assures them that they deal in genuine currency.

Even more fundamentally, Lewis adds, there is ultimately no escape to some sure footing outside of human experience—in every experience, you are either looking along, or else looking at. “In other words, you can step outside one experience only by stepping inside another.”⁷⁰

Sound knowledge, Lewis concludes, is possible only if we, “on pain of idiocy, deny from the very outset the idea that looking *at* is, by its own nature, intrinsically truer or better than looking *along*.”⁷¹ Instead, as far as possible, “One must both look *along* and *at* everything.” While Lewis heartily affirms our desire for knowledge, he reminds us that reason alone—looking *at*—is not sufficient for true understanding. The knowledge we can have can only be won through the more difficult but more rewarding task of constantly holding in tension our experiences of looking at and looking along.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 215

⁷¹ Ibid.

Importantly, Lewis gives us more than an account of rationalism's failure. He goes further to examine the role of imagination. Imagination's special function is a memorable highlight of his essay, "Myth Became Fact." Lewis opens with an example that evokes the distinction between what is solely rational and what is meaningful. "'Would not conversation be much more rational than dancing?' said Jane Austen's Miss Bingley. 'Much more rational,' replied Mr. Bingley, 'but much less like a ball.'" ⁷²

Here, as in "Meditation in a Toolshed," Lewis addresses the dilemma between reflective distance and direct experience. Our dilemma arises, according to Lewis, because we think abstractly, but the "only realities we experience are concrete—this pain, this pleasure, this dog, this man." ⁷³ For us, most of the time, knowing something by reflection and knowing it by participation are distinct and exclusive moments. "You cannot *study* Pleasure in the moment of nuptial embrace, nor repentance while repenting, nor analyze the nature of humor while roaring with laughter. But when else can you really know these things?" ⁷⁴ We cannot have meaningful experiences of reflection without experiences of participation. At the same time, participation puts off reflection, and reflection inhibits participation. Across most of our experience, the two moments never quite coincide. Yet each moment calls for the other; each reveals its meaning more fully through the other.

⁷² Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," 139.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 140

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 140

In “Myth Became Fact,” Lewis again exhorts us to not abandon imagination on the illusion that we will gain more certain knowledge by trusting intellect alone. Here, as in his later and more basic “Meditation,” he reminds us that the meaningful experience we long for remains possible only while we hold intellect and imagination in balance. Yet, in “Myth Became Fact,” Lewis goes farther to consider a way to relieve the tension between these complementary yet typically mutually exclusive modes of knowing.

Our dilemma, at any moment, is between knowing universals through reflection, on the one hand, and knowing particulars through direct participation, on the other. “Of this tragic dilemma,” he argues, “myth is the partial solution.”⁷⁵ Myth, as Lewis explains, has the special capacity to make principles imaginable. That is, myths give us participatory experience of universal principles. These universal principles are otherwise available to us only through rational reflection. In receiving a myth, “You were not knowing, but tasting; but what you tasted turns out to be a universal principle.” State the principle and you return immediately to the world of abstraction. “It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely.”⁷⁶

The ability of myth to reintegrate discursive reason and participatory experience rises from its special capacity to convey reality. Lewis describes myth’s function:

⁷⁵ Ibid., 140

⁷⁶ Ibid., 141

What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley; *in hac valle abstractionis*.⁷⁷

Myth's integrative function transcends both discursive knowledge and direct experience: "if you prefer, [myth] is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to. It is not, like truth, abstract; nor is it, like direct experience, bound to the particular."⁷⁸ Myth carries us into a realm that compels us not to deliberation on principles, but to wonder and reflection before realities.

Myth conveys meaning. Two implications concern us. First, as noted above, Lewis warns us against abandoning imagination on the pretense of securing certitude because in doing so we deny ourselves access to the themes that make life worth living—for example, beauty, joy, and wonder. Second, Lewis warns us against a second and equally fatal error: confusing truths about the reality with the reality itself. It matters that we speak rightly about reality. But the truths, as far as we can see them, gain their significance from the reality. Reality, not our vision of it, is ultimate.

For all Lewis delivers in "Myth Became Fact," he sees there is a further point to be made. He begins his appeal in the essay by magnifying the distinction between efficiency and meaning. His aim is to show that, often in human experience, the most rational, efficient action contradicts the more reasonable, meaningful action. Yet he

⁷⁷ In this valley of separation.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

fails to fully develop this tension. He completes the task in a 1948 essay, "Priestesses in the Church."⁷⁹ Here, as in "Myth Became Fact," he starts by evoking the difference between rational efficiency and meaning, with assistance from Austen's Bingley siblings. This time, however, Lewis strengthens Mr. Bingley's position. "He ought to have replied with a *distinguo*. In one sense conversation is more rational for conversation may exercise the reason alone, dancing does not."⁸⁰ Miss Bingley prefers rational activity. Her brother reminds us that reason alone is often inadequate to the occasion. Lewis, for his part, insists that we avoid the error of identifying as irrational activities that exercise faculties other than reason. "[T]here is," he writes, "nothing irrational in exercising other powers than our reason." To be sure, he continues, "On certain occasions and for certain purposes, the real irrationality is with those who will not do so." He gives examples: "The man who would break a horse or write a poem or beget a child by pure syllogizing would be an irrational man; though at the same time syllogizing is in itself a more rational activity than the activities demanded by these achievements."⁸¹

Lewis's insight is that a balanced use of intellect and imagination helps us to understand the world. Stephen Logan writes, "Just as Lewis knows that there is more to reality than what our senses can get at, epistemologically he knows that there is more

⁷⁹ C.S. Lewis, "Priestesses in the Church," *God in the Dock* (1948).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 234

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

to the mind than ratiocination.”⁸² Against a distorted and distorting view of reason, Lewis contends, “It is rational not to reason, or not to limit oneself to reason, in the wrong place; and the more rational a man is the better he knows this.”⁸³ The point, as the more truly rational man knows, is not efficiency gained by reason alone. Rather, the point is to receive, experience, and embody meaning through activities that require powers in addition to, and other than, discursive reason—namely, through imagination.

As I conclude this section, I want to reemphasize the special function of story or myth in Lewis’s estimation. “The story,” he writes, “does what no theorem can quite do.”⁸⁴ It has the special capacity to convey human experience because, like our experience, it transcends discursive thought. “For Lewis,” Alister McGrath writes, “a myth is a story which evokes awe, enchantment, and inspiration, and which conveys or embodies an imaginative expression of the deepest meanings in life—meanings that prove totally elusive in the face of any attempt to express them abstractly or conceptually.”⁸⁵ Lewis is attracted to “myths as a deeper mode of engagement with fundamental human questions, yearnings, and imaginative questings.”⁸⁶ In his account, myth is enduringly effective because it illuminates some permanent feature of the human condition. “A great myth,” he writes, “is relevant as long as the predicament of

⁸² Stephen Logan, *Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 38.

⁸³ Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church,” 234.

⁸⁴ Lewis, “On Stories,” 15.

⁸⁵ McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 63.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

humanity lasts; as long as humanity lasts. It will always work, on those who can receive it, the same catharsis.”⁸⁷

DIMENSIONS OF POETIC EXPERIENCE

The insight that humans are poetical animals grounds and animates Lewis’s scholarship and stories. I now turn to his reflections on a few distinct and interrelated aspects of our nature as creative creatures. I address his comments under three headings that name significant dimensions of our experience as poetical animals: humans as story-making, story-formed, and meaning-bearing creatures. Attention to these dimensions of human experience informs my approach to persons, stories, and politics throughout the present inquiry.

To start, we are story-making creatures. Around the time of his deeply influential conversations on imagination with C. S. Lewis, Tolkien writes, “The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval.”⁸⁸ He echoes Barfield when he remarks that language is, precisely, a “fantastic device”—an instrument of imagination.⁸⁹ As he puts it in *Mythopoeia*, “trees are not ‘trees,’ until so named and

⁸⁷ Lewis, “The Mythopoetic Gift of Rider Haggard,” *On Stories*, 100. Compare Tolkien’s observation in “On Fairy Stories,” that mythical stories talk about permanent and fundamental features of the human condition.

⁸⁸ Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” 21-22.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

seen and never were so named, till those had been who speech's involuted breath unfurled."⁹⁰ Lewis likewise asks, "[I]s not the sky itself a myth?"⁹¹

For Tolkien, our power to make stories—to use the fantastic device of language to name the natural world or to weave complex myths—is an expression of our character as subcreators. He portrays humans as subcreators in *Mythopoeia*:

The heart of Man is not compound of lies,
but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,
and still recalls him. Though now long estranged,
Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned,
and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned,
his world-dominion by creative act:
not his to worship the great Artefact,
Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.⁹²

Tolkien here describes us as dis-graced subcreators: creatures who deny and abuse the power of the tongue. Yet, he concludes, "The right has not decayed. We make still by the law in which we're made."⁹³ As a scholar and poet, Lewis eventually accepts and embodies Tolkien's insight: "*Abusus non tollit usum*. Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker."⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Tolkien, *Mythopoeia*, 29-31.

⁹¹ Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," 142.

⁹² Tolkien, *Mythopoeia*, 53-64.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

⁹⁴ Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," 55. Abuse does not take away use.

Our character as story-making creatures remains a source of beauty as well as mystery. Lewis explains in a letter:

“Creation” as applied to human authorship seems to me to be an entirely misleading term. We re-arrange elements He has provided. There is not a vestige of real creativity *de novo* in us...And that surely is why our works (as you said) never mean to others quite what we intended; because we are re-combining elements made by Him and already containing *His* meanings. Because of those divine meanings in our materials it is impossible that we [should] ever know the whole meanings of our own works, and the meaning we never intended may be the best and truest one. Writing a book is much less like creation than it is like planting a garden or begetting a child; in all three cases we are only entering as *one* cause into a causal stream which works, so to speak, in its own way.⁹⁵

We are not creators, but we are capable of making stories out of the materials with which we are endowed.

We are also formed by stories. Stories have the power to expand our vision and experience of the world and, in turn, to orient and strengthen us for action in the world. For most of us, Lewis observes, the pressures of daily routine narrows our experience of reality. Some severely narrow what they view as “real life.” Against this narrowing perspective, Lewis suggests, “what they call ‘real life’” is “perhaps, the groove through some far wider area of possible experience to which our senses and our biological, social, or economic interests usually confine us.”⁹⁶ It is this very restriction of vision that art helps us counteract. With the insight of a theorist and craftsman Lewis writes that it is “one of the functions of art [to] present what the narrow and desperately practical

⁹⁵ C.S. Lewis, Letter to Sister Penelope, C.S.M.V., 20 February 1943, *Letters*, 203-204.

⁹⁶ C.S. Lewis, “On Science Fiction,” *On Stories*, 66.

perspectives of real life exclude.”⁹⁷ Following Lewis, Anthony Esolen observes that literary experience can relieve the blinding pressures of daily business and rationalism. He writes, “A good book is a dangerous thing. It carries within it the possibility—and it is *only* a possibility—of cracking open the shell of a routine that prevents us from seeing the world.”⁹⁸

In short, stories can expand our vision, can help us better see the world we inhabit. What they give us is not so much an outlet for escaping as a means of rediscovery. Sometimes a story takes us away from ordinary life and “paradoxically enough, strengthens our relish for real life.”⁹⁹ The best stories take us away from our ordinary world in order to give us eyes to see more clearly what it is and can be. “As for escapism, what we chiefly escape is the illusions of our ordinary life.”¹⁰⁰ Quality stories are not a retreat from reality, but a means of rediscovering it. They re-enchant a disenchanted world. In McGrath’s account, “Lewis came to see that myths possess an innate capacity to expand the consciousness and imaginations of their readers. A myth awakens imaginatively a longing for something that lies beyond the grasp of reason.”¹⁰¹

Importantly, stories have the capacity not only to re-enchant the world, but also to change us in a way that enables us to act in the world. “A myth points, for each

⁹⁷ Lewis, “On Stories,” 10.

⁹⁸ Esolen, *Ten Ways*, x. Cf. Lewis, “On Stories.”

⁹⁹ Lewis, “On Stories,” 14.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, “Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*,” 85.

¹⁰¹ McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 64.

reader, to the realm he lives in most. It is a master key; use it on what door you like.”¹⁰²

Stories are not superfluous in the face of our real concerns, such as daily needs, careers, and political events. In fact, Lewis contends that these exigencies only increase our need for stories. He rebuts the suggestion that we need stories less as the burdens of ordinary life increase. To those who think stories have no place in a sound contemporary education, Lewis replies: “There is something ludicrous in the idea of so educating a generation which is born to OGPU and the atomic bomb.”¹⁰³

Finally, we are meaning-bearing creatures. We want to know that our lives matter. We want to know that our days have purpose. We want to be satisfied with the work of our hands, and to know that what we do matters to others. Questions of politics and ethics begin in questions of meaning. That is, what it means to live well together depends on the purpose of the human person and of political society. For Lewis, the point of departure for thinking about these questions is recognizing that morality is not contingent, “but built into the structure of reality.”¹⁰⁴ Alister McGrath similarly argues, “It has not been adequately appreciated that Lewis supplements the classic Stoic notion of *logos spermatikos* with that of *mythos spermatikos* – a narrative embedded within the deeper structures of the created order, which enables, shapes, and moulds the construction and narration of human stories.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Lewis, “Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*,” 85.

¹⁰³ C.S. Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” *On Stories*, 39.

¹⁰⁴ Logan, *Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 38.

¹⁰⁵ McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 65.

And here we come full circle. McGrath makes the connection well:

Lewis declares that human beings construct myths because they are *meant* to. They have been created by God with an innate capacity to create myths as echoes of a greater story or ‘story of a larger kind.’ In that human beings bear God’s image, human beings are endowed with the Creator’s capacity to create, in a suitably accommodated and reduced manner.¹⁰⁶

In sum, it is part of our meaning to be story-makers and story-formed.¹⁰⁷ Ironically, as a final point, one weighty consequence of denying our nature as story creatures is that we fail to use reason well: we fail to critique the stories we actually live by and tell, and fail to ask whether they are the most meaningful stories we can live by.

CONCLUSION

In the dilemma of intellect and imagination, rationalism cuts off access to the most significant questions in politics—questions of meaning and ethics. In response, through their stories, Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell take up the task of recovering the questions of meaning and ethics, which are indispensable for inquiries into key themes of politics. These authors use and appeal to the very capacities of poetic imagination their contemporaries deny: they write stories to deal with fundamental aspects of the human experience, including the moral dimensions of politics.

Stories matter, first, because they are a mode of uniting two ways of knowing—that is, knowing by imagination and knowing by reason, which provide access to meaning and truth, respectively. Further, and critically, stories matter because they are

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 142: “If God chooses to be mythopoeic – and is not the sky itself a myth? – shall we refuse to be mythopathic?”

a mode of expressing the knowledge gained through the joined working of imagination and reason. Stories uniquely unite experience and reflection. They are therefore especially suitable for adding to our experience and provoking us to reflect on moral questions we encounter. In short, as Anthony Esolen writes, you read good books, “because they are companions who will tell you what they have seen of the truth, and they tell you in a way you will not soon forget.”¹⁰⁸

Yet, stories are limited. They communicate insights, but, in the main, they are restricted to helping us see what their authors have seen.¹⁰⁹ Even so, because authors deal with the strange material of reality, they can sometimes give us even more than they themselves have seen.¹¹⁰ Lewis, Huxley, and Orwell do this and they do it for a decidedly political purpose, addressing questions and themes of personal responsibility in the face of political oppression.

In his essay, “Totalitarianism and Literature,” Orwell defends literature as an essential feature of human experience and warns that it is imperiled by the invasive expansion of the state.¹¹¹ He writes, “I believe that literature of every kind, from the epic poem to the critical essay is menaced by the attempt of the modern state to control the emotional life of the individual.”¹¹² In the same essay Orwell says, “It is easy

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Esolen, “Read Literature to Learn and Love the Truth,” *Crisis Magazine*, April 9, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ My thanks to Dr. David Corey for drawing my attention to the point.

¹¹⁰ See Lewis, Letter to Sister Penelope, 20 February 1943, *Letters*.

¹¹¹ George Orwell, “Literature and Totalitarianism,” *Essays*, 364.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 362.

to pay lip service to the orthodoxy of the moment, but writing of any consequence can only be produced when a man *feels* the truth of what he is saying; without that the creative impulse is lacking.”¹¹³ Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell write because they feel the truth of what they are saying. Accordingly, in the chapters that follow, I turn to address themes of personal responsibility as these authors present them to us. In the next chapter, I address the integrity of the word.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 364.

CHAPTER 3 INTEGRITY OF THE WORD

"[W]ord and language form the medium that sustains the common existence of the human spirit as such."¹

- Josef Pieper

INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this chapter is to survey each narrative's treatment of the role of the word in the quest for personal responsibility. I take the integrity of the word as my first essential theme because the word is the special human means of communicating about reality—of describing things to ourselves and to others. A healthy use of the word is therefore basic to becoming accountable actors; we cannot give account without meaningful language. Integrity of language matters for the task of becoming a responsible person because the word is a critical means of communication.

The corruption of language, however, has long concerned thoughtful men. As Josef Pieper sums up Plato's objection to the Sophists, for example: "corruption of the word—you are corrupting the language!"² It is an enduring and present temptation in the human experience. As Pieper writes, the corruption of language is a "timeless temptation that since the beginning of history has always required man's resistance and will require it forever."³ In thinking about personal responsibility in relation to the integrity and corruption of the word, I find helpful both Josef Pieper's concise reflection

¹ Josef Pieper, *Abuse of Language—Abuse of Power*, 15.

² *Ibid.*, 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

“Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power,” and George Orwell’s shining essay “Politics and the English Language.”

RESPONSIBILITY AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE WORD

In “Politics and the English Language,” Orwell insists that language matters to political regeneration because political regeneration starts with seeing, thinking, and speaking clearly about people and politics. Accordingly, he says, the use and abuse of language are the concern of every person. In his words, “the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers.”⁴

Like Orwell, Josef Pieper argues that words and their use matter to everyone because words are a special means of understanding and sharing in reality. He writes, “Words and language, in essence, do not constitute a specific or specialized area; they are not a particular discipline or field.”⁵ Pieper continues, and tells us something Orwell does not, namely, why at the most basic level words matter. In his description, “word and language form the medium that sustains the common existence of the human spirit as such.” The consequence, in his account, is that, when men corrupt the word, they affect and taint human existence itself.⁶

To think clearly about the corruption of language, we first have to think about the integrity of language. Pieper describes two distinct and related aspects of language

⁴ George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” *Essays*, 955.

⁵ Pieper, *Abuse of Language*, 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

that, together, constitute its integrity. “First,” he writes, “words convey reality. We speak in order to name and identify something that is real, to identify it for *someone*, of course—and this points to the second aspect in question, the interpersonal character of human speech.”⁷ In short, the integrity of language consists in its capacity to enable us *to express*, or describe, and *to share* truth about the world. The word is special because it is by the word, as Pieper writes, that we can “declare publicly what according to one’s best knowledge and clear conscience is the truth about things.”⁸

CORRUPTION OF THE WORD

When men corrupt the word, in turn, they abuse either the capacity of the word to convey reality, or the interpersonal character of language, or both. More bluntly, we can either pervert language into an instrument for concealing instead of revealing reality, or we can degrade language into an instrument of force, or both. The man who distorts language to manipulate a person rather than to share truth about things with him, degrades that person and himself.

Pieper highlights the clear yet subtle connection between disrespect for the word and disrespect for people:

The degradation, too, of man through man, alarmingly evident in the acts of physical violence committed by all tyrannies (concentration camps, torture), has its beginning, certainly much less alarmingly, at that almost imperceptible moment when the word loses its dignity. The dignity of the word, to be sure,

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 38.

consists in this: through the word is accomplished what no other means can accomplish, namely, communication based on reality.⁹

In other words, if we care about justice for people and want to be responsible, we will care about the integrity of language—about using words honestly and clearly.

It is sometimes easier to identify abuses of persons than to identify the abuses of language that amount to abuses of persons. George Orwell sees this tendency. He writes “Politics and the English Language” to help us see and act to correct the abuse of language. To start, Orwell reminds us that the integrity of language is our responsibility. Persons are responsible to use language as clearly as possible, and constantly to guard against abusing it. More specifically, every person is responsible for his use and abuse of language. Orwell sees and agrees that we live in an age where our language, like our culture, is decaying. “The point,” he alerts us, “is that the process is reversible.”¹⁰

Orwell’s particular concern, as one of my teachers in high school phrased it to me, is the relationship between sloppy thought and sloppy language. He writes,

A man may take to drink because he feels himself a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.¹¹

In short, unclear thought corrupts language and unclear language corrupts thought.¹²

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰ Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” 954.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 954.

¹² *Ibid.*, 964.

What, one reasonably asks, does corruption of the word look like? In his essay, Orwell gives practical examples, as well as a few questions and rules to sharpen one's thinking and writing. His specific guidelines for writing can challenge and mature anyone who cares to improve as a thinker and communicator. My focus, however, is on Orwell's broader critique—his diagnosis of the corruption of language. He summarizes the two points of his diagnosis: "modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer."¹³

Regarding the first point, he argues that, because the point in using words is to express a thought clearly, "What is needed above all is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about."¹⁴

Second, what Orwell adds (a contribution my earlier rationalism blinded me to when I first encountered this essay) is a focus on image.¹⁵ The purpose of a metaphor, he explains, is to call up an image in order to make one's meaning clearer to others. Worn out and inadequate images undermine this aim. If we want to communicate in a way that illuminates and cements what we are trying to say, we will invent images that make our meaning clearer.

In particular, Orwell calls out those who misuse and obscure the image, the most powerful form of the word. Because the purpose of metaphor is to call up an image, he

¹³ Ibid., 961.

¹⁴ Ibid., 965.

¹⁵ Ibid., 961.

argues, a person who mixes incompatible metaphors does so because he is not seeing and not thinking about what he is trying to say. A similar move is to use words to prevent others from seeing and thinking about what one is trying to say. He writes, “People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck...this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.”¹⁶ Orwell’s insight here aligns with C.S. Lewis’s warning in his essay, “The Death of Words”: “And when, however reverently, you have killed a word you have also, as far as in you lay, blotted from the human mind the thing that word originally stood for. Men do not long continue to think what they have forgotten how to say.”¹⁷

Throughout “Politics and the English Language,” Orwell’s purpose is to consider “language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought.”¹⁸ He closes with a reminder that language matters supremely for politics. Men corrupt language in order to “make lies sound truthful and murder acceptable and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”¹⁹ At stake in our choice to use language clearly or else abuse it, are life and our ability to share truth with one another—in other words, our dignity as humans.

¹⁶ Ibid., 963.

¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, “The Death of Words,” *On Stories*, 107.

¹⁸ Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” 967.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Before I turn to the texts, I want to mention a further problem that both Josef Pieper and George Orwell describe, a problem each of the stories highlights: the threat of false reality. As Pieper notes, the danger of false reality is an old problem, and one to which Plato is sensitive.²⁰ Pieper describes the threat of false reality: “the place of authentic reality is taken over by a fictitious reality; my perception is indeed still directed toward an object, but now it is a *pseudoreality*, deceptively appearing as being real, so much so that it becomes almost impossible any more to discern the truth.”²¹ What Plato saw in his society, Pieper sees in ours. “For the general public,” he writes, “is being reduced to a state where people not only are unable to find out about the truth but also become unable even to *search* for the truth because they are satisfied with deceptions and trickery that have determined their convictions, satisfied with a fictitious reality created by design through the abuse of language.”²² The danger is not only that some men attempt to conceal the truth from others, but that those whose access to truth is hindered accept the lies they are given, so that they never search for more.

For Orwell, the specific feature of totalitarian state is the project of some men to impose a false, changeable, and changing reality on others. He identifies a totalitarian

²⁰ See Pieper’s survey, *Abuse of Language*, 34.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 34-35

society as one in which men hold power by force or fraud, and prohibit the truthful recording of facts and emotional sincerity.²³ He writes,

The peculiarity of the totalitarian state is that though it controls thought, it doesn't fix it. It sets up unquestionable dogmas and alters them day by day. It needs dogmas, because it needs absolute obedience from its subjects, but it can't avoid the changes, which are dictated by the needs of power politics. It declares itself infallible, and at the same time it attacks the very concept of objective truth.²⁴

He makes the critique again in a later essay: "What is new in totalitarianism is that its doctrines are not only unchangeable but also unstable. They have to be accepted on pain of damnation, but on the other hand they are always liable to be altered at a moment's notice."²⁵ Orwell's critique matters because, on his diagnosis, the primary instrument of some men's attempt to impose a false reality on others, as it actually plays out in the worst of human political experience, is the abuse of language.

INTEGRITY OF LANGUAGE IN THESE STORIES

My purpose in the introduction above has been to better explain in what sense I use the phrase *integrity of language*, and to describe some of the main characteristics of corruption of language and false reality. In the analysis of *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that follows, I show how select characters use and abuse language. All three works, but especially *That Hideous Strength* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, convey far more about the use and abuse of language than I can

²³ George Orwell, "The Prevention of Literature," *Essays*, 939.

²⁴ Orwell, "Literature and Totalitarianism," 363.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 362

discuss. At the same time, the best way to look along with these authors at the place of language in their characters' quest to become responsible persons is to focus on specific characters and to closely read their stories. I therefore take a deliberately, but I think not unduly, narrow approach to the texts. My purpose is primarily to demonstrate how these stories help us think about the integrity of the word. For each story, I highlight one central theme I think the author explores with exceptional insight and ability. Thus, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I examine memory and language; in *Brave New World*, literature and language; in *That Hideous Strength*, reality and language. For each theme, I compare two or more characters as they deal with the word.

MEMORY AND LANGUAGE IN *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR*

I first address *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. A notable strength in George Orwell's treatment of the integrity of the word is his attention to the relationship between language and memory. I want to look along with Orwell by following his character Winston Smith as Winston discovers the relationship between language and memory, and its significance for his own efforts to act responsibly.

Winston Smith works in the Department of Records, a branch of the Ministry of Truth. His daily assignment is to revise old newspapers to agree with whatever Party leaders claim at the moment. At his desk, Winston is one of thousands of workers who implement the Party's program of "rectifying" the past.²⁶ "This process of continuous alteration," as Winston knows, is "applied not only to newspapers, but to books,

²⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 41-43.

periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons, photographs—to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance.”²⁷ Winston is an agent of the Party, and a man who senses that memory and history—that is, accounts of what men have done and loved, accounts of how things have been—matter.

In a moment of clarity, Winston reflects that his work is further removed from reality than forgery or falsification. “It was merely the substitution of one piece of nonsense for another. Most of the material that you were dealing with had no connection to anything in the real world, not even the kind of connection contained in a direct lie.”²⁸ He knows the material he revises has been revised countless times before. A change is not a change from fact to falsity, but from one falsity to another. Yet the problem is more basic still. As Winston describes it, “Statistics were just as much a fantasy in their original version as in their rectified version.”²⁹

The relationship between memory and language becomes important to Winston as the divide between his daily work and his desire to be a person threatens to destroy him. The reason the divide threatens to destroy Winston is that his daily work denies his conscience and agency. Critically, through the work it assigns, the Party rejects

²⁷ Ibid., 42.

²⁸ Ibid., 43.

²⁹ Ibid., 42.

memory, and Winston's memory in particular. A dialogue of fact, doubt, and sharp critique of the Party, and consciously semi-self-aware mind games plays in Winston's mind:

The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed—if all records told the same tale—then the lie passed into history and became truth. "Who controls the past," ran the Party slogan, "controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. "Reality control," they called it: in Newspeak, "doublethink."³⁰

Winston becomes more concerned as he realizes the magnitude of the Party's power over the past and the citizens of Oceania through its manipulation of the word. "The past, he reflected, had not merely been altered, it had been actually destroyed."³¹ Winston muses that the Party's power to destroy the past is more terrifying than torture and death. "The frightening thing," he thinks one morning during exercises, "was that it might all be true. If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, *it never happened*—that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death."³² The reason for his fear, I think, is that he sees that the Party's power over history is more fundamentally dehumanizing than torture and death. In controlling memory and language, the agents of the Party exert the power not merely to shape the

³⁰ Ibid., 37.

³¹ Ibid., 38.

³² Ibid., 36-37.

events of one's life, but, at the most basic level, to determine the meaning and reality of one's life—that is, to say what one has done and loved, what it means, and finally, whether one has lived at all.³³

Importantly, Winston comes to these conclusions because he has sustained the difficult and, in Oceania, self-indicting work of thinking about and remembering and questioning the significance of memory. He is an agent of the Party. He is one of the persons who perform the task he finds more terrifying than torture and death. He carries out orders to alter history, even to make other persons disappear. Caught in the tension between his work as a manipulator of words, and a person who sees the significance of human accounts, Winston decides to risk his life for the sake of the sanity he sometimes sees. “He had committed—would still have committed, even if he had never set pen to paper—the essential crime that contained all others in itself. Thoughtcrime, they called it.”³⁴ Because he knows the truth of a person's story matters, he risks his own story. The penalty for thoughtcrime is to become a person who has never existed. Orwell writes, “Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out, your one-time existence was denied and then forgotten. You were abolished, annihilated: *vaporized* was the usual word.”³⁵

Orwell starts his story on the day Winston starts to write in his journal. We follow Winston as he discovers his initial motives and better understands his choice to

³³ Ibid., 171-172 and passim.

³⁴ Ibid., 21.

³⁵ Ibid.

write. Most basically, Winston writes because he senses that words and a reliable record of men's experiences and actions are fundamental to truthful existence in the world. His immediate incentive to open a diary is the sense, which he thinks might have been confirmed in his interactions with two persons at the Department of Records earlier in the day, that there might be others like him, others who see through the Party's lies.³⁶ He acts on this incentive once he has acquired a "peculiarly beautiful book," and discovered sufficient sanctuary in a corner of his flat, at a desk strangely situated beyond visual range of the ever-watching, ever-listening telescreen.³⁷

When he first takes pen to paper, Winston is nearly overwhelmed with a sense of helpless disorientation and inadequacy. What year is it? Who is he writing for? How can his pen channel the "interminable restless monologue that had been running inside his head, literally for years"?³⁸ Winston knows his words will not crack the Party's suffocating orthodoxy. He writes for other reasons.

He writes, in part, to put down the swirling thoughts, the raging questions, to quell fears of what he might do, to reckon with himself for what he has done and the choices he is making.³⁹ He writes, in part, because he knows that not death but annihilation awaits him. "The diary would be reduced to ashes and himself to vapor."⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid., 12, 13, 15, 19.

³⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

³⁸ Ibid., 9-10.

³⁹ Compare Ibid., 97.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 29.

The significance of this fact, I think, is that death is still part of a story; annihilation is a story erased. Death happens to a person; annihilation makes one an *unperson*: it erases one's presence and actions from the stage of human history. As he realizes yet again later, "Whatever happened you vanished, and neither you nor your actions were ever heard from again. You were lifted clean out of the stream of history."⁴¹ Aware that the past has been annihilated and that he will be annihilated, Winston writes to stay sane. He soon realizes, "It was not by making yourself heard, but by staying sane that you carried on the human heritage."⁴² He writes to situate himself in the real world, as best he can see it, against the ever-changing orthodoxy those in power impose. Accordingly, his greeting runs:

"To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free,
when men are different from one another and do not live alone—to a
time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone:
"From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the
age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink—greetings!"⁴³

Perhaps even more than he first intends or knows, Winston writes to remember. The fragments he commits to paper join with fragments he remembers, piece by piece, through waking thoughts as well as dreams. The more he remembers, the more he knows about who he is, what he has done, what he desires to do and must do. Most fundamentally, Winston writes to stay human. He cannot control the actions of others in the present, nor can he make his words matter to people in the past or future. He

⁴¹ Ibid., 172.

⁴² Ibid., 30.

⁴³ Ibid., 30.

can, however, do his best to stay human. As he is later able to articulate it, “the object [is] not to stay alive but to stay human.”⁴⁴

Winston writes as he thinks: in English rather than in the Party jargon. “In your heart,” his colleague Syme observes, “you’d prefer to stick to Oldspeak, with all its vagueness and its useless shades of meaning. You don’t grasp the beauty of the destruction of words.”⁴⁵ The advantage of destruction, Syme claims, is that it constricts language in a way that enforces orthodoxy by taking away the words men need in order to think. “Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought. In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.”⁴⁶ He concludes, “The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect.”⁴⁷

In his thoughts and writing, against the mind-shattering pressure of orthodoxy, Winston strives to preserve meaningful speech. In the lunch hall one day, he watches a man, the kind of character the Party consistently produces, spew thoughtless words. “The stuff that was coming out of him consisted of words, but it was not speech in the true sense: it was noise uttered in unconsciousness, like the quacking of a duck.”⁴⁸ With great effort, Winston tries to cling to thoughtful words. Importantly, his journal is an

⁴⁴ Ibid., 174.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁶ Compare Lewis, “Death of Words.”

⁴⁷ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 55.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 57.

essential link between his memories and unbidden unorthodox thoughts, on the one hand, and his actions, on the other.

Winston's journal provides a connection to the past and captures the internal dissonance Winston experiences. It is a foothold in a world apart from the Party's contrived world. Orwell tells us, by contrast, that citizens under thirty are sunk deep into the world the Party has created. We learn that people over thirty fear their children will turn them in to the Thought Police for unorthodoxy. In Orwell's summary, "It was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children."⁴⁹

The Parsons children, in particular, embody the problem of false reality. They have never known and do not desire to know anything but life as the Party says it is. We meet the children early in Orwell's story, and in two subsequent scenes. Orwell introduces the Parsons children when Winston responds to Mrs. Parsons' request for help with her broken sink.⁵⁰ Winston's observations during his visit to the family's apartment confirm that the nine-year-old boy and seven-year-old girl are entirely absorbed in the Party program. The soundtrack of their lives is the military music of the telescreen. Their games are military games. Their primary allegiance is the children's league, the Spies. Their parents and peers praise them for their devotion to the Party. As Winston leaves the boy pelts him in the neck with a catapult, and calls him a traitor.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 22-27.

Mr. Parsons reports to Winston and Syme that, on a recent fieldtrip, his daughter had trailed a man and reported him as an enemy agent.⁵¹ “Ah, well,” Parsons boasts, “what I mean to say, shows the right spirit, doesn’t it? Mischievous little beggars they are, both of them, but talk about keenness! All they think about is the Spies, and the war, of course.”⁵² Later, after he has been arrested and taken to the Ministry of Love, Winston meets Parsons in his prison cell.

“‘Who denounced you?’ said Winston.

“‘It was my little daughter,’ said Parsons with a sort of doleful pride. ‘She listened at the keyhole. Heard what I was saying, and nipped off to the patrols the very next day. Pretty smart for a nipper of seven, eh? I don’t bear her any grudge for it. In fact I’m proud of her. It shows I brought her up in the right spirit, anyway.’”⁵³

The Parsons children, like their peers and their peers’ parents, are cut off from memory, from a world before or beyond the Party; they are trained to see all doubt toward the Party as capital offense. As far as the Parsons kids know, reality is what the Party says it is. They do not question. Should they find themselves with questions while young or, like Winston, when they are grown, they will most likely be shielded by the intellectual and visceral habits the Party has given them.

Those who, like Winston, become aware of a choice between the changeable and changing history of the Party, on the one hand, and history confirmed by experience, memory, and written word, on the other, have a choice. Orwell makes it clear that, somewhere along the way, his character O’Brien faced the same choice as

⁵¹ Ibid., 60.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 245.

Winston, and chose differently. O'Brien looms, a shadowy figure in Winston's mind as in Orwell's pages. In the end, it is O'Brien who personally and persistently assaults Winston's memory, sanity, and affections.

Memory and language matter, Winston is convinced, to the task of staying human. While he tortures Winston, O'Brien burns a newspaper article that has been crucial evidence to Winston that the Party is fabricating history. Still, Winston clings to the evidence of memory.

"Ashes," [O'Brien] said. "Not even identifiable ashes. Dust. It does not exist. It never existed."

"But it did exist! It does exist! It exists in memory. I remember it. You remember it."

"I do not remember it," said O'Brien.

Winston's heart sank. That was doublethink. He had a feeling of deadly helplessness.⁵⁴

O'Brien batters Winston's mind, mocks him, causes him to doubt the past, memory, and the present. "You suffer from a defective memory," he tells Winston.⁵⁵ In a moment of strength, Winston protests: "But how can you stop people remembering things?" cried Winston, again momentarily forgetting the dial. "It is involuntary. It is outside oneself. How can you control memory? You have not controlled mine!"⁵⁶

In a display of his insatiable hunger for control, O'Brien shatters Winston in mind and body. O'Brien holds up four fingers. "Do you see five fingers?" Winston did.

He saw five fingers and there was no deformity. Then everything was normal again, and the old fear, the hatred and the bewilderment came crowding back

⁵⁴ Ibid., 259.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 258.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 261.

again. But there had been a moment—he did not know how long, thirty seconds, perhaps—of luminous certainty, when each new suggestion of O’Brien’s had filled up a patch of emptiness and become absolute truth, and when two and two could have been three as easily as five, if that were what was needed.⁵⁷

After further conditioning, Winston is allowed a season of recovery. He writes again.

This time, he copies down Party slogans.⁵⁸ Before long, however, he falls into a reverie and cries out for Julia. “Julia! Julia! Julia, my love! Julia!”⁵⁹ After Winston’s outburst, O’Brien says to him, “You are improving. Intellectually there is very little wrong with you. It is only emotionally that you have failed to make progress.”⁶⁰ He assigns Winston to Room 101. There he proceeds to shatter Winston’s heart by forcing Winston to betray Julia.⁶¹

Winston is released from the Ministry of Love. He does not write anymore. Orwell shows us a beaten Winston sitting at the Chestnut Tree Café. “Uncalled, a memory floated into his mind.”⁶² He remembers a day when he played and laughed happily with his mother and little sister. “He pushed the memory out of his mind. It was a false memory. He was troubled by false memories occasionally.”⁶³ Even after the worst of his physical and mental torture, Winston’s memory remains. Only now he has

⁵⁷ Ibid., 270-271.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 290.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 293.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 295.

⁶¹ Ibid., 300.

⁶² Ibid., 308.

⁶³ Ibid., 309.

been beaten into denying it. Soon after, Orwell writes, Winston feels the “long-hoped-for bullet [entering] his brain...He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.”⁶⁴ He knew the Party would beat him. He knew the Party would destroy his memory and words. Orwell makes us see Winston defeated, bludgeoned beyond recognition. In doing so, he gives us another opportunity and reason not to become O’Brien.

LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE IN *BRAVE NEW WORLD*

Aldous Huxley highlights the role of language throughout *Brave New World*, particularly through his focus on literature. He shows that literature has the capacity to provide experiences and transmit traditions that threaten a society’s contrived morality. We can better understand Huxley’s view of the significance of literature by examining his portrayal of the hazard it presents to the World State and the role it plays for his major characters. The relationship between literature, persons, and their political society features prominently in *Brave New World*. Early in the work, Huxley shows the World State’s initiative in conditioning its citizens, in part, significantly, by controlling their access to literature. Throughout, we watch as three important characters, Lenina Crowne, Helmholtz Watson, and John the Savage, interact with literature and questions of meaning. Finally, in the capstone conversations with World Controller Mustapha Mond, we learn why conditioning and control regarding literature are priorities in the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 311.

World State. In the sections that follow, I sketch these three portrayals of the significance of literature and language in turn.

Controllers in the World State aim to keep citizens safe from books. They ensure that citizens' access to literature is circumscribed and censored. The novel opens with a tour of the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, where new people are bioengineered according to the goals of the men in charge of the World State. As our tour guide, Mr. Foster, proudly informs a group of students, the facility produces, "So many individuals, of such and such quality," to meet quotas set by the Predestinators.⁶⁵ Huxley initiates us into the World State with a detailed tour of the biotech processes for ectogenic reproduction and prenatal social conditioning. We follow the young students as they take instruction from the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning. Moving from room to room, they observe workers as they fertilize and multiply embryos, and then condition the embryos for caste, occupation, and climate. Bioengineering is key to achieving the World State's goals: Community, Identity, and Stability.

Bioengineering, however, is not the most important element of conditioning. Instead, some of the most intense social conditioning in the World State focuses on books and botany—that is, on literature and natural beauty. The reason Huxley shows, I think, is that attraction to books and flowers rises from an innate desire for meaning and beauty. I follow Huxley's focus on books, as I consider the broader topics of language and literature.

⁶⁵ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 10.

Early in the narrative, we learn the World State's reasons for vigilant control of literature: reading is a waste of the Community's time and threatens to decondition biologically-, hypnopaedically-, and socially-instilled reflexes.⁶⁶ Official policy on books includes a ban on unapproved literature, conditioning for certain infants, restrictions on resources available to school children, and a firm but gentle pressure on citizens' daily habits. Members of lower castes are conditioned for a total aversion to books, while members of higher castes are allowed certain books, at limited times.

The Director guides his students to the Neo-Pavlovian Conditioning Rooms in the Infant Nurseries, where nurses subject lower-caste infants to psychologically and physically painful conditioning. The nurses set out bowls of roses and bright, inviting nursery books, and then return with a group of Delta eight-month-olds. In the sun-filled room, the babies crawl toward the roses and books. As they reach for their colorful pages and petals, the Director orders the Head Nurse to press a small lever. "There was a violent explosion. Shriller and ever shriller, a siren shrieked. Alarms bells maddeningly sounded."⁶⁷ He makes a second command. Electric shocks liven the nursery floor. After a few minutes, the Director ends the treatment. "The explosions ceased, the bells stopped ringing, the shriek of the siren died down from tone to tone into silence. The stiffly twitching bodies relaxed, and what had become the sob and yelp of infant maniacs broadened out once more into a normal howl of ordinary terror."⁶⁸ Painfully,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

the infants learn: “Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks—already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly.”⁶⁹ Pleased, the Director declares, “They’ll be safe from books and botany all their lives.”⁷⁰

For members of upper-castes, school administrators ensure that students have access only to reference books. “If our young people need distraction, they can get it at the feelies. We don’t encourage them to indulge in any solitary amusements.”⁷¹

If the World State’s conditioning counters one’s inclination to enjoy literature and nature, a web of explicit as well as almost imperceptible mandates help prevent deconditioning. Should a shaft of interest pierce the lessons instilled by loud noises, electric shocks, and socialization, a citizen would find it difficult to secure texts, time, and a place to read. State officials have banned certain works, including history, theology, sacred texts, and poetry.⁷² More generally, the structure of the day in the World State prevents anyone from being alone accidentally.⁷³ At least, the person who attempts to gain solitude is likely to provoke warnings against unorthodoxy from others. Between entertainment and Solidarity Services, compelled group-time fills all out of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 21-22.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁷¹ Ibid., 163.

⁷² Ibid., 35, 217-219, 230-233.

⁷³ Ibid., 41, 45, 88.

work hours. In the World State, literacy within prescribed boundaries is strictly for information, entertainment, and compliance.

Officials carefully keep people from unapproved literature. It is important to note, however, that Huxley shows that the conditioners cannot wholly eradicate every person's love of literature and nature. The most they can do before birth is to severely retard development. Yet Huxley implies that even persons whom conditioners order retarded to the point of minimal capacity possess a love of beauty. He has us observe, for example, the Epsilon-Minus Semi-Moron who runs the lift, as the moron glimpses a glorious day. "Oh, roof!" he repeated in a voice of rapture. He was as though suddenly and joyfully awakened from a dark annihilating stupor. 'Roof!'"⁷⁴ In the end, despite all official efforts toward prenatal and decanted members of the World State alike (that is, toward persons yet to be and already born), solitude and significance inevitably tempt individuals.

To better understand Huxley's portrayal of the effects and limits of conditioning, and the place of language and literature, we can contrast three of his characters. My aim in comparing Lenina Crowne, Helmholtz Watson, and John the Savage, is to highlight Huxley's insights into the role of language and literature for different characters as they think, love, and act in the brave new world.

Lenina Crowne practices orthodox consumption of information and sensational entertainment. She consumes texts for information, and poetry and music for sensation. She is suspicious of Bernard Marx's penchant for solitude, and will have none

⁷⁴ Ibid., 59.

of it herself. On a date with Bernard, Lenina is “appalled by the rushing emptiness of the night” and tries to fend it off. “Let’s turn on the radio. Quick!”⁷⁵ When she’s happy, or trying to seduce the Savage, Lenina wields the poetry of the feelies:

*Hug me till you drug me, honey;
Kiss me till I’m in a coma:
Hug me, honey, snuggly bunny;
Love’s as good as soma.*⁷⁶

Lenina believes time is for wasting, and *soma* for filling time.⁷⁷ When she’s down, she follows hypnopaedic wisdom: “one cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy sentiments.”⁷⁸

Perhaps the greatest consequence for Lenina is that the voice she has is not her own. In all she says and does, she expresses the prejudices her nurses, teachers, and peers have conditioned her to have, according to the directives of the State. Is her mind merely “Suggestions from the State”? Is her mind, as the Director says, entirely the product of sleep-taught wisdom: “The mind that judges and desires and decides—made up of these suggestions”?⁷⁹

To be sure, Lenina has cause to question these Suggestions from the State. Besides Bernard’s constant challenges to orthodoxy, she has her own childhood experience of questioning awareness of sleep-teaching and, a distinct experience, memory of that initial doubt. Huxley writes, “Lenina remembered her first shock of fear

⁷⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 166, 193-194.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 29.

and surprise; her speculations through half a wakeful hour; and then, under the influence of those endless repetitions, the gradual soothing of her mind, the soothing, the smoothing, the stealthy creeping of sleep.”⁸⁰ Against these doubts, as Huxley describes it, Lenina strives “to preserve her incomprehension intact.”⁸¹ To the best of the conditioners’ ability, then, and to the best of her own ability, Lenina’s mind is “Suggestions from the State.” And still, despite her conditioning, Lenina has unorthodox attachments and longings.⁸² She is attached first to Foster, and then, apparently unshakably, to John. Her desire for the Savage, moreover, is intensified by John’s own literature-sustained self-restraint, which I describe below.

Helmholtz Watson conducts a frustrated quest for meaning. He and John the Savage have similar questions about meaning, but contrasting experiences with language and poetry. Their stories yield connected and distinct insights.

Handsome and intellectually able, Watson is Bernard Marx’s friend, and a professor at the College of Emotional Engineering. Like Bernard, he is different. “That which had made Helmholtz so uncomfortably aware of being himself and all alone was too much ability. What the two men shared was the knowledge that they were individuals.”⁸³ Unlike Bernard, however, Helmholtz is disturbed by a peculiar hunger. He is discontent. “Really, and at the bottom,” in Huxley’s description, “he was

⁸⁰ Ibid., 74.

⁸¹ Ibid., 92.

⁸² Ibid., 40-41, 178, 186-188.

⁸³ Ibid., 67.

interested in something else. But in what? In what?"⁸⁴ By the standards of the World State, Helmholtz's dissatisfaction is inexplicable. He is smart, handsome, confident, a capable teacher; women want him; and he is remarkably good at his work as an emotional engineer. For all that, he harbors a deep frustration he can barely articulate. "I'm thinking," he says to Bernard, "of a queer feeling I sometimes get, a feeling that I've got something important to say and the power to say it—only I don't know what it is, and I can't make any use of the power."⁸⁵ The trouble, as far as he can say, is that his writing is not satisfying. "If there was some different way of writing...Or else something to write about..." After a moment of reflection, he summarizes his dissatisfaction for Bernard. "It's not enough for the phrases to be good; what you make with them ought to be good too."⁸⁶

Helmholtz Watson longs for purpose. More than the technical excellence he already possesses, he wants meaningful words formed by significant experiences. Helmholtz knows the potential of language. "Words," as he says, "can be like X-rays, if you use them properly—they'll go through anything. You read and you're pierced."⁸⁷ At the same time, he knows that descriptions of empty experiences fall short of the meaningful communication he desires. Exasperated, he presses, "But what on earth's the good of being pierced by an article about a Community Sing, or the latest

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 70.

improvement in scent organs?”⁸⁸ Finally, he comes to the crucial question that burdens him as he tries to fulfill the duties of an emotional engineer: “Can you say something about nothing?”⁸⁹ Helmholtz wants purpose and power for his words and work.

Experience teaches Helmholtz that the prerequisite of meaningful writing is meaningful experience. In particular, it is his experiment in solitude that enables him to feel the full weight of his own discontent.⁹⁰ A two-week withdrawal from his normal routine of faculty meetings and women produces effects he can initially identify only as “odd...very odd.”⁹¹ Solitude unsettles him. Before long, he attempts to give words to his experience. On his own time, he authors a few rhymes on the theme.

Events turn for Helmholtz when he decides to share his work with students in his course of Advanced Emotional Engineering for Third Year Students. He uses the rhymes to illustrate a point in class and to see whether he can provoke in his students similar feelings of being alone.⁹² His unorthodox move provokes unsurprising results, and he finds himself in conflict with his Principal. In the process, however, he realizes an unanticipated reward. “I feel,” he later confides in Bernard, “as though I were just beginning to have something to write about.”⁹³

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 67-69.

⁹¹ Ibid., 68.

⁹² Ibid., 180.

⁹³ Ibid., 182.

Eventually, Helmholtz shares his rhymes with John. In response, the Savage treats Helmholtz to a few verses by Shakespeare on solitude. The poet's words pierce Helmholtz. He responds strongly to the words as they express and affirm his own experience.⁹⁴

Helmholtz's experiment in solitude enables him to see with unexpected clarity his dissatisfaction. Yet he remains blind. He asks time and again what might be worth writing about, but cannot see a satisfactory answer. This thoroughly conditioned emotional engineer is stuck looking at things from the outside. Helmholtz's experience of what is significant in Shakespeare, which provokes in him a strong emotional response, does not match his description of what is significant in Shakespeare. He admires Shakespeare for excellence in engineering emotion, which echoes his description of his own highest aspirations.⁹⁵ In short, Helmholtz quests for meaning but confuses the task of engineering certain emotions, on the one hand, with the task of giving adequate words to human experiences, on the other.

Helmholtz's confusion is evident: he gets the question wrong. "Why was that old fellow such a marvellous propaganda technician? Because he had so many insane, excruciating things to get excited about. You've got to be hurt and upset; otherwise you can't think of the really good, penetrating, X-rayish phrases."⁹⁶ Helmholtz looks for meaningful experiences, but cannot see—precisely, *fails to see*—the one example

⁹⁴ Ibid., 183.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 184.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 185.

available to him in the Savage's passion.⁹⁷ He is left frustrated. As he later says to John and Mustapha Mond, "[I]t is idiotic. Writing when there's nothing to say."⁹⁸

When he earns exile to an island for individuals, Helmholtz knows enough to choose a tempestuous isle for himself. Still, he cannot fathom the reality that significant experiences come in relationship with others and in response to experiences not wholly ours to control. His instilled prejudices and practices blind him to the experiences most worth living and writing about. He misses important insights because he conceives potentially meaningful experience entirely in terms of solitary experience. Worse, he conceives his goal as excellence in engineering emotional responses. Helmholtz misses the point of piercing language. He knows there must be a purpose, some right use of language. But he never sees beyond the goal of the Emotional Engineer. He wants to be a good Emotional Engineer more than he wants to live a life worth writing about.

Huxley demonstrates the power of poetry in the Savage's story. His use of Shakespeare's poetry in the Savage's story is more than a stylistic motif. Rather, he shows through John's experience and interaction with Shakespeare that literature has the capacity to motivate and constrain John's thoughts, affections, and actions. In contrast to Helmholtz and other citizens of the World State, the Savage suffers a range of meaningful experiences. For John, born outside the stable world, life is full of experiences of passion, affection, abuse, anger, awe, humiliation, longing, disgust, helplessness, penitence, and anticipation—in short, something to write about. We learn

⁹⁷ Ibid., 185.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 221.

about many of these experiences when he recollects them at Bernard's request. For conditioned citizens of the World State, there is nothing to write about because the state protects members of the brave new world, as far as possible, from experiences like the Savage's.

John finds in literature words that affirm, expand, and illuminate his experiences. The poetry becomes a source of significance that John continually revisits, and which returns to him. John remembers and reflects on Shakespeare's words in a way that shapes him as he journeys and matures. Huxley describes the poetry as words that sing and thunder, and, by turns, visit and invite John.⁹⁹ Shakespeare's lines sometimes motivate and sometimes console him. Throughout, Huxley shows that the poetry has a decisive role in John's journey. Here it is useful to survey key moments where Savage interacts with the poetry. My point is not to catalog Huxley's use of Shakespeare in *Brave New World*. Rather, I want to highlight the active role the poetry plays in forming John's character and his experience of the world.

After John's mother Linda teaches John basic words, she gives him her old manual on *The Chemical and Bacteriological Conditioning of the Embryo. Practical Instructions for Beta Embryo-Store Workers*. He becomes competent at deciphering the words, but wants to know what they mean; Linda has no satisfying response.¹⁰⁰ When John is about twelve, his mother presents him with a copy of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 131-132, 192, 195, 209, 210.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 130.

Huxley's depiction of John's introduction to Shakespeare is significant. In this episode, we watch John discover that the words are meaningful for him. They speak to his present situation and, importantly, give him vision and compel him to act.

When he first meets Shakespeare's works, John turns to a passage opaque to him yet evocative of the lewd relationship between Linda and Popé. As he reads, the words work on him. "The strange words rolled through his mind; rumbled, like the drums at the summer dances, if the drums could have spoken; like the men singing the Corn Song, beautiful, beautiful, so that you cried."¹⁰¹ The passage affects him like his elderly Indian mentor's magic, but he finds it "better than Mitsima's magic, because it meant more, because it talked to *him*; talked wonderfully and only half-understandably, a terrible, beautiful magic," about Linda's affair with Popé.¹⁰² In Shakespeare, John discovers words more adequate to his world than any he has known. Though the full meaning of the poetry eludes him, it strengthens his vision and directs his passions.

The words are potent. "[T]heir magic," Huxley writes, "was strong and went on rumbling in his head, and somehow it was as though he had never really hated Popé before; never really hated him because he had never been able to say how much he hated him. But now he had these words, these words like drums and singing and magic."¹⁰³ As the poetry enables him to express his previously inarticulate disgust at Linda and Popé's affair, it moves him action. "The magic was on his side, the magic

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

explained and gave orders.”¹⁰⁴ Moved by hatred and disgust, the Savage strikes his mother’s lover. While Popé thwarts his attack, John has indelibly experienced the power of literature to shatter the status quo.

Shakespeare’s works stay with the young man as his passion for Lenina develops. While John watches Lenina in her *soma*-shrouded sleep one day, the poetry comes to describe her beauty, and to keep him from violating her in his desire for her.¹⁰⁵ Later, after an unsettling evening at the feelies, which he judges base and ignoble, Savage returns to *Othello*.¹⁰⁶ Lenina’s appreciation for the lewd entertainment of the feelies leaves John “obscurely terrified lest she should cease to be something he could feel himself unworthy of.”¹⁰⁷ In another scene, he imagines himself and Lenina as Romeo and Juliet.¹⁰⁸ As John’s affection for Lenina and her desire for him grows, she surprises him with a visit. He professes his admiration, and eventually his love, in the poet’s language.¹⁰⁹ When Lenina subsequently tries to seduce him with her kisses and embrace, his conscience “thunder[s] poetically.”¹¹⁰ Betrayed and disgusted, he forces her off himself and passionately censures her with Shakespeare’s words.¹¹¹ When she

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 133

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 171, 170.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 189, 191.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

retreats to the bathroom to re-clothe herself, he strides in the next room, “marching, marching to the drums and music of magical words.”¹¹²

Shakespeare’s poetry, in particular the lines that gives the story its title, accompanies John on his expedition into the World State. Soon after they meet on the Reservation, Bernard Marx asks the Savage to explain more of his life—a life which Bernard says is “almost inconceivable” because it includes “[a] mother, and all this dirt, and old age, and disease...”¹¹³ After the Savage relates his memories and reflections, Bernard invites him to London. In glad anticipation of visiting the Other Place his mother has described in her stories, John breaks out in Miranda’s lines: “O wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, that has such people in it.”¹¹⁴

However, John’s introduction to London quickly turns his eagerness for the Other World into disgust. He finds repulsive the uniformity of Bokanovsky groups, batches of citizens produced exactly alike to meet quotas in the World State.¹¹⁵ Miranda’s lines come again. Huxley writes, “‘O brave new world...’ By some malice of his memory the Savage found himself repeating Miranda’s words. ‘O brave new world that has such people in it.’”¹¹⁶ Later, near a breaking point, John reels before the

¹¹² Ibid., 195.

¹¹³ Ibid., 123.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 139.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 159-160.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 160.

mystery of Linda's death, and is struck again by the standardization of Bokanovsky groups. Their uniformity denies unique personality and so defiles his mother's death. At that moment, the poetry returns. "The singing words mocked him derisively. 'How beautiful mankind is! O brave new world...'"¹¹⁷

Suddenly, the words revisit him, with a new sound this time. Huxley describes the transformation:

In his mind the singing words seemed to change their tone. They had mocked him through his misery and remorse, mocked him with how hideous a note of cynical derision! Fiendishly laughing, they had insisted on the low squalor, the nauseous ugliness of the nightmare. Now, suddenly, they trumpeted a call to arms. "O brave new world!" Miranda was proclaiming the possibility of loveliness, the possibility of transforming even the nightmare into something fine and noble. "O brave new world!" It was a challenge, a command.¹¹⁸

The command gives him vision and initiative: "Linda had been a slave, Linda had died; others should live in freedom, and the world be made beautiful. A reparation, a duty. And suddenly it was luminously clear to the Savage what he must do; it was as though a shutter had been opened, a curtain drawn back."¹¹⁹

Motivated by the command he finds in Miranda's words, the Savage disrupts the routine end-of-workday dismissal and *soma* distribution, proclaiming, "I come to bring you freedom."¹²⁰ Helmholtz Watson and Bernard Marx make their respective contributions to John's protest. Of course, the citizens of the World State do not

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 210,

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

understand what John means by “freedom.” After their riot is subdued, the Savage, Helmholtz, and Bernard end up in a conversation with World Controller Mustapha Mond.

Naturally, John and Helmholtz have questions for Mond about the role of books and writing in the World State. Through their culminating conversation, Huxley explores the place of literature in a stable world. The Savage asks Mond why Shakespeare is prohibited in the World State.¹²¹ Over the course of their conversation, Mond explains that a ban on books helps to make passionless people. The controllers want a stable world, and passion entails instability. Old things and beautiful things are too appealing to be safe. Mond says, “Beauty’s attractive, and we don’t want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones.”¹²² The controllers’ bet is that passionless people cannot understand, much less write, stories of great love, loss, longing, achievement, or hope.

The new entertainment aims to stir emotion without appealing to any lasting allegiance or affection. Emotional engineers in the brave new world work with nothing. As far as the directors of the World State can manage it, entertainment audiences have almost no significant experiences—no suffering, no devotion, no longing, no unpredictability. There is literally nothing to write about. “You can’t make flivvers

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹²² *Ibid.*

without steel—and you can't make tragedies without social instability."¹²³ The emotional engineer's task, accordingly, is to manufacture sensations, shallow and short-lived.

The ban on books, then, helps to protect the stable world. More fundamentally, it hedges the contrived standards of the World State. Faithful love becomes obscenity in a world where mutual objectification and mutual use trump mutual sacrifice and mutual satisfaction as the mysterious reward of human relationship. Faithful love—and all that goes with it—violates the contrived morality of a stable world. The prohibited books are a threat to the stable world because they transmit traditions of theology, arts, and sciences. More dangerously, the prohibited books give experiences that could form or motivate people toward initiative and action in the world—the greatest threats to stability. Mond explains that even a factory run by “separate and unrelated individuals of good heredity and conditioned so as to be capable (within limits) of making a free choice and assuming responsibilities” is a disaster waiting to happen.¹²⁴ Why would any stability-loving controller ever want to encourage people to make choices and act? Why would he ever allow them to be introduced to works that risk stirring their hearts or revealing beauty, sacrifice, and courage in the lives of others?

In summary, the controllers' ban on books, and encouragement of collective forgetfulness, is an attempt to separate persons from literature because books are an especially significant source for capturing and illuminating meaning in human

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

experience. Literature and truthful language are sources and signs of meanings that run counter to the meaning, for individual lives and political society as a whole, that the controllers of the World State want to establish. Literature, like physical or intellectual difference, has the potential to make us aware of our distinct personalities. And, from the perspective of proponents of a stable world, the effects of time spent alone with a book are even worse: solitude means time and space to reflect on the discovery that one is a distinct person with potential, weaknesses, thoughts, and longings. To be conditioned is to be cut down to fit and further a stable society. Stories have the potential to introduce great loves, great trials, great tragedies, comedies, and fairy tales. In short, literature poses a risk of deconditioning—of “cracking open the shell of a routine that prevents us from seeing the world,” as Esolen puts it.¹²⁵ By turns stories can magnify and mold our longings and form our actions in the world.

Through his journey, John the Savage has learned that “social instability” is an inadequate name for human experiences far more wonderful and frightening than the people of the brave new world have imagined. As Huxley makes clear in a brilliant passage in which Mond gives a group of students a history lesson and then again in the culminating scenes of the book, the social instability controllers fear means a man and woman in love, a mother feeding her children, little ones at play, and all the tears and labor that caring for bodies and souls requires. It means suffering because some things are worth it. It means days of lament as well as days of laughter. It means lament heavier for the laughter, and laughter sweeter for the lament.

¹²⁵ Esolen, *Ten Ways*, x. Cf. Lewis, *On Stories*.

John wants real happiness, and knows it must entail suffering and sorrow. “But I don’t want comfort,” he says to Mond, “I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.”¹²⁶ John knows that the effort to prevent social instability undermines the best human attempts at the less certain, more rewarding kind of surety persons can try to create between one another. John comprehends, in an experiential, participatory way, the piercing and formative potential of poetry. Because he suffers and resists, he interacts the poetry in a way that is inaccessible to most citizens of the World State, even including Helmholtz.¹²⁷ In all, Aldous Huxley shows through his characters John, Lenina, and Helmholtz that literature has this transformative potential.

LANGUAGE AND REALITY IN *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH*

I focus on Lewis’s characters Mark Studdock, a young man who wants to move up in the academic world, and John Wither, the Deputy Director of the National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments. Lewis shows us how the use and abuse of the word become daily decisions through Mark’s journey and interactions with Wither. Throughout *That Hideous Strength*, and especially when he deals with language, Lewis plays with the story of the Tower of Babel. Here I want mainly to focus on Mark’s journey, and then pay special attention to the events in language he witnesses as the story climaxes.

¹²⁶ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 240.

¹²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 238.

Mark Studdock's worst fear is to live as an "outsider."¹²⁸ He thrives when he thinks those at the center of power want him there, too.¹²⁹ As he tries to secure a new job at the National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments, Mark sacrifices honest thought and clear language for the sake of power. As we follow Mark in his first days at the Institute, we see that he faces men in positions of power whose duplicitous use of language is hard to recognize and even more difficult to confront or escape. In particular, the young man is not prepared for his first attempts to learn something from John Wither. Mark wants to know what his role at the N.I.C.E. will be. As he tries to find out, we learn that Wither uses more words to say less than any other character in the book.

Wither answers Mark with jargon, flattery, and ambiguity. After a few attempts, Mark realizes that he has a choice between finding the truth about his role at the N.I.C.E., and risking losing that role altogether.

Mark did not ask again in so many words what the N.I.C.E. wanted him to do...partly because a perfectly distinct question would have sounded a crudity in that room—a crudity which might suddenly exclude him from the warm and almost drugged atmosphere of vague, and yet heavily important, confidence in which he was gradually being enfolded.¹³⁰

Wither bends words until they are meaningless, and lures Mark to do the same, for the sake of acceptance. Witness one of Mark and Wither's maddening exchanges:

¹²⁸ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 107.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

“Well,” said Mr. Wither in a voice so low and rich that it was almost a sigh, “I am very glad you have raised this issue now in a quite informal way. Obviously neither you nor I would wish to commit ourselves, in this room, in any sense which was at all injurious to the powers of the Committee. I quite understand your motives and—er—respect them. We are not, of course, speaking of an Appointment in the quasi-technical sense of the term; it would be improper for both of us (though, you may well remind me, in different ways) to do so—or at least it might lead to certain inconveniences. But I think I can most definitely assure you that nobody wants to force you into any kind of straight waistcoat or bed of Procrustes. We do not really think, among ourselves, in terms of strictly demarcated functions, of course. I take it that men like you and men are—well, to put it frankly, hardly in the habit of using concepts of that type. Everyone in the Institute feels that his own work is not so much a departmental contribution to an end already defined as a moment or grade in the progressive self-definition of an organic whole.”

And Mark said—God forgive him, for he was young and shy and vain and timid, all in one—“I do think that is so important. The elasticity of your organization is one of the things that attracts me.”¹³¹

Engaging with Wither’s intentionally meaningless words is both unproductive and formative for Mark.

Elasticity, pointedly and frustratingly reflected in Wither’s language, is a core principle of the N.I.C.E. The Institute is an absorbing, boundless entity whose creators refuse to recognize boundaries, for themselves or for others. Its directors intend to entirely draw in and program initiates. Their aim in society is unlimited re-making of persons and social institutions. They know the key to success in achieving the Institute’s all-absorbing purpose is to refuse to name that purpose. To the point, Wither later affirms his desire to entirely embrace Mark in the arms of the organization. “Of course,” he says, “nothing is so much to be desired as the greatest possible unity. You will not suspect me of under-rating that aspect of our orders. Any fresh individual brought into

¹³¹ Ibid., 52-53.

that unity would be a source of the most intense satisfaction to—ah—all concerned. I desire the closest possible bond. I would welcome an interpenetration of personalities so close, so irrevocable, that it almost transcends individuality. You need not doubt that I would open my arms to receive—to absorb—to assimilate this young man.”¹³²

Meanwhile, Mark wants to know what his job is, and Wither only blathers. Mark becomes helpless and hungrier for acceptance. Eventually, he gives up trying to make Wither explain his duties at the N.I.C.E. “After that,” Lewis writes, “he had no further chance of bringing the Director to the point and whenever the slow, gentle voice ceased he found himself answering it in its own style, and apparently helpless to do otherwise despite the torturing recurrence of the question, ‘What are we both talking about?’”¹³³ Rather than calling out Wither for his nonsense, Mark learns to use words with skillful ambiguity.¹³⁴

One particularly harmful habit Mark cultivates is his own use of jargon. Unaware of his practice, he uses a language that does not fit the reality he thinks he is describing. Mark’s education, Lewis writes,

had had the curious effect of making things that he read and wrote more real to him than things he saw. Statistics about agricultural laborers were the substance; any real ditcher, ploughman, or farmer’s boy, was the shadow. Though he had never noticed it himself, he had a great reluctance, in his work, ever to use such words as “man” or “woman.” He preferred to write about

¹³² *Ibid.*, 240.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

“vocational groups,” “elements,” “classes” and “populations”: for, in his own way, he believed as firmly as any mystic in the superior reality of the things that are not seen.¹³⁵

His abstracted vocabulary makes him think he sees things that are not real and, at the same time, fail to see the realities before his face.

Gleaming promises of power lead Mark to do worse things with words than merely maintaining subservient silence and using distorting jargon. Before long, he is lying to himself. Moreover, he plans to deceive his wife Jane. Full of worry about his precarious position at the N.I.C.E., Mark imagines the confident report he will give to Jane when he returns to her. Lewis writes, “This imaginary speech of his own gradually drove out of his mind the real experiences he had undergone. Those real experiences of misgivings and uneasiness...”¹³⁶ Mark’s self-deceptions are essential to his attempts to navigate obstacles to success at the Institute.

More and more, Mark uses words to uphold the pretend world he has built for himself. He can sustain that world only as long as there is no one else to witness the pandering relationships and conversations he sees as necessary to his success. Yet, Lewis writes,

it is only justice both to Mark and to Jane to record that he would have found it impossible to conduct in her hearing any one of the hundred conversations which his life at Belbury involved. Her mere presence would have made all the laughter of the Inner Ring sound metallic, unreal; and what he now regarded as common prudence would seem to her, and through her to himself, mere flattery, back-biting and toad-eating. Jane in the middle of Belbury would turn the whole

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

of Belbury into a vast vulgarity, flashy and yet furtive. His mind sickened at the thought of trying to teach Jane that she must help to keep Wither in a good temper and must play up to Fairy Hardcastle.¹³⁷

Mark has built the world in which he now lives through countless conversations and subservient silences. To engage in those conversations requires constant willing self-deception and trained choice not to notice or remember the lies. He knows Jane's mere presence will burn the comfortable fog of professional confidentiality that N.I.C.E. members prefer to keep. He knows he will be unable to maintain his part in the subservience and mutual deception that characterize the N.I.C.E. if Jane is there to watch and listen, too.

Once Mark learns to lie easily to himself, he agrees to lie to the public. One evening, members of the inner ring of the N.I.C.E. ask Mark to write reports of an event—a planned public emergency that will allow the Institute to claim police powers—before it happens. At first, Mark is confused. Lord Feverstone encourages him:

“You surely don't need to wait for a thing to happen before you tell the story of it!”¹³⁸

“‘Well, I admit,’ said Mark, and his face was full of laughter, ‘I had a prejudice for doing so, not living in Mr. Dunne's sort of time nor in looking-glass land.’”¹³⁹

Without further pause, Mark agrees to write the false reports. “This was the first thing Mark had been asked to do which he himself, before he did it, clearly knew to be

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

criminal. But the moment of his consent almost escaped his notice; certainly, there was no struggle, no sense of turning a corner."¹⁴⁰ Mark's moment of choice, writes Lewis, "slipped past in a chatter of laughter, of that intimate laughter between fellow professionals, which of all earthly powers is strongest to make men do very bad things before they are yet, individually, very bad men."¹⁴¹ His constant pursuit is power, and he hardly notices his desire intoxicates and threatens to poison him.

The job becomes more agreeable as Mark works.¹⁴² Lewis describes the young man's lines of argument to justify his work to himself. He quickly becomes invested in his made-up reports. "And anyway, the thing was a kind of joke."¹⁴³ Besides, he considers the task a stepping-stone to future success and security. Moreover, he tells himself, "It wasn't as if he was taken in by the articles himself...And anyway, if he didn't do it, someone else would." As he writes, Mark feels himself coming closer to the power he wants.

And all the while the child inside him whispered how splendid and how triumphantly grown up it was to be sitting like this, so full of alcohol and yet not drunk, writing (with his tongue in his cheek) articles for great newspapers, against time, "with the printer's devil at the door" and all the inner ring of the N.I.C.E. depending on him, and nobody ever again having the least right to consider him a nonentity or cipher.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 132.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

What Mark knew about truthful reporting before he wrote the articles for the N.I.C.E. was that to make up history is to say that events, and actions, and what actually happens do not matter. He sacrifices his unexamined but better prejudice toward telling the truth about human affairs in order to secure a place in the Institute's inner circle.

In a conversation in his college rooms, Dr. Dimble confronts Mark about his scramble to power in the N.I.C.E. "For one moment," writes Lewis, "the first for many years, Mark saw himself exactly as a man like Dimble saw him. It almost took his breath away."¹⁴⁵ When the young man insists he is trustworthy, Dimble presses him, "You?" The professor's question rips through the false image of himself Mark carries. Dimble's question makes Mark see himself as he is. It shreds the fantasies of power and esoteric knowledge Mark entertains—fantasies he guards from challenge because by avoiding anyone outside the tight circle at the N.I.C.E.

Furthermore, Dimble confronts Mark about N.I.C.E. takeover of the newspapers. "Do you suppose that I don't know that you have control over every paper in the country except one?"¹⁴⁶ Before long, Mark is arrested and taken into the Objective Room of the Nice. There he learns that words matter, and can be used rightly or wrongly. Rather than detail his time in the Objective Room here, I want to skip forward to a climactic event Mark witnesses upon his escape.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 216.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 218.

On the night of Mark's escape, Belbury, home of the N.I.C.E., is scheduled to host a grand banquet. During the banquet, nearly all the dinner guests' language becomes confused. The curse of Babel descends upon all who have distorted language for the sake of power. Above the din and frenzy of gibberish, Lewis brings Merlin in to shout, "*Qui Verbum Dei contempserunt, eis auferetur etiam verbum hominis.*"¹⁴⁷ Translated, "They that have despised the word of God, from them shall the word of man also be taken away."

In contrast to the banquet at Belbury that unfolded just prior at St. Anne's. There, speech is not confused, but instead becomes clearer, full of high humor, more beautiful. The company at St. Anne's played with words—"If not plays upon words, yet certainly plays upon thoughts, paradoxes, fancies, anecdotes, theories laughingly advanced yet (on consideration) well worth taking seriously, had flowed from them and over them with dazzling prodigality."¹⁴⁸ They witness "the very heart of language, [the] white-hot furnace of essential speech." The ugly clamor and confusion at Belbury contrast the beautiful clarity and wit of conversation at St. Anne's. Through these events, Lewis evokes an appreciation of the living and active word.

It is the same appreciation of language he draws out of readers who witness Dr. Dimble speaking the Great Tongue earlier in the story. When he speaks, "great syllables

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 318.

of words that sounded like castles came out of his mouth. Jane felt her heart leap and quiver at them."¹⁴⁹ Lewis continues,

The voice did not sound like Dimble's own: it was as if the words spoke themselves through him from some strong place at a distance—or as if they were not words at all but present operations of God, the planets, and the Pendragon. For this was the language spoken before the Fall and beyond the Moon and the meanings were not given to the syllables by chance, or skill, or long tradition, but truly inherent in them as the shape of the great Sun is inherent in the little waterdrop. This was Language herself, as she first sprang at Maledil's bidding out of the molten quick-silver of the star called Mercury on Earth, but Viritrilbia in Deep Heaven.¹⁵⁰

Lewis's understanding of language is important because he recognizes that language has the capacity to communicate reality—indeed, that essential language communicates reality.

Words are essential to accountability. An understanding of oneself as a person capable of and motivated to act is essential to becoming the kind of person who can answer for and make sense of his actions. The process of developing this understanding is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 225-226.

CHAPTER 4 INTEGRITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

“Thus, skidding violently from one side to the other, his youth approached the moment at which he would begin to be a person.”¹

- C.S. Lewis, describing Mark Studdock’s choice

“But if the object was not to stay alive but to stay human, what difference did it make?”²

- George Orwell, describing Winston Smith’s choice

INTRODUCTION

My intent in this chapter is to better see how select characters in *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* develop, or fail to develop, a sense of their individuality and come to know what to do with it. In each story, we watch as certain characters gain and act on a sense that they are accountable to a standard of conduct, which stands independent of them and of those who attempt to coerce their actions. What moves these characters? What distinguishes them from characters that, on the whole, lack integrity? Or, it is perhaps better to ask, what distinguishes the moments in which these characters demonstrate integrity from the moments in which they are overwhelmed or owned by other people, allegiances, or affections?

The theme of personal integrity has a key place in a study in political science because we are especially interested in personal agency and action. To start, some of

¹ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 214.

² Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 214

the most insightful students of politics in the modern era make it a point to remind us that politics is made not by forces or times but by the mysterious intersection of agency and unpredictability in human affairs.

Tocqueville, for example, warns against the temptation, particularly strong in our democratic moment, to believe that human affairs are “not voluntary and that, without knowing it, societies obey a superior, dominating force.”³ Against this doctrine of fatality, he reminds us that the harder task for those who write about events is to tell readers “how [a nation] could have acted to take a better route.”⁴ Hannah Arendt similarly focuses on the importance of personal agency. Like Aristotle and Alasdair MacIntyre, she balances the insight that men can act freely with the corollary insight that human action is unpredictable. She writes:

Man’s inability to rely on himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all.⁵

Finally, Arendt’s contemporary Eric Voegelin connects the insight into personal agency to everyman’s situation. He says bluntly, “No one is obliged to take part in the spiritual crisis of a society; on the contrary, everyone is obliged to avoid this folly and live his life in order.”⁶

³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. II, 1.20, 471.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 244.

⁶ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*.

The insight into personal agency which Tocqueville, Arendt, and Voegelin relay further enables us to see as twin dangers both self-assured progressivism and fearful golden-ageism. To be convicted of inevitable progress or to be convicted of inevitable decline are the same thing. The man who draws a line that runs up-and-up on a trajectory of unstoppable progress and the man who draws a line that runs into the dirt are alike blind to the essential truth that human agents make human events.

The point here is that these thinkers invite us to see, as they do, that personal integrity matters. If people make politics, it matters *that* and *how* people come to know and use their agency.

Following this same insight, Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell draw our attention to the difficult, formative quest for personal integrity. In the sections that follow, I compare and contrast key figures from their novels. Before I turn to examine the stories, however, I should say more about the quality I am looking for. What is integrity? As a starting point, I offer a description, rather than definition, to highlight a few features of the quality I want to observe and analyze through Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell's stories.

Perhaps the most basic aspect of integrity is individuality. Critically, by individuality I mean understanding oneself as a personal but not autonomous agent. In all three stories, the characters with the strongest sense of individuality are, distinctively, not the most autonomous. More than simply seeing oneself as an individual, integrity consistently entails acting to fulfill the requirements of accountability as one becomes aware of them. Furthermore, integrity is not a solely

intellectual, or solely emotional, or solely physical quality. Instead, it entails aligning one's mind, soul, and body, together, toward the same goal.

One gains integrity by acting with clarity toward a purpose—a capacity that requires reflection and practice over time. The fact that integrity is a quality one develops over time means that one sees oneself as a person with dignity and responsibilities more or less clearly at various points, and that one knows what to do better or worse at various points, and that one manages to act more or less consistently at various points.

Integrity is risky. The man who attempts to orient himself toward specific goals and to act consistently often finds himself in conflict with persons who reject his chosen goals and refuse to acknowledge limits to their own power. A fair description of integrity, therefore, must also remind us that people do not act in a void. We live, as MacIntyre says, “upon a stage we did not design” and “find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making.”⁷ In the texts before us, as in our lives, actors exist in relationships, environments, and circumstances, some of which are not theirs to choose or change. One of the strengths of narrative, as Chapter 2 shows, is its capacity to convey the complexity of human experience. Accordingly, the stories in this study, like real life, invite us to attend to a significant and recurrent question: how far are we responsible for our conduct? Aristotle, as we saw in Chapter 1 above, broaches the reality of constraint and coercion. Elie Wiesel likewise calls our attention to those realities. He speaks from the far side of an extreme experience of mental, spiritual, and

⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 213, quoted above.

physical coercion. He writes, “I shall never forgive myself...Nor shall I ever forgive the world for having pushed me against the wall, for having turned me into a stranger, for having awakened in me the basest, most primitive instincts.”⁸ These men raise the question: to what extent is each of us accountable for his own integrity?

In summary, for now, I want to say that to possess personal integrity is to recognize oneself as an individual—a distinct though not autonomous agent, capable of knowing, willing, and loving—and to act to align one’s soul and body, toward a clear purpose. But developing integrity in one’s person is a journey, not a linear trajectory. It is an effort in which one is likely to be both strengthened and shattered, at different points, by the actions of others and the events one encounters, as well as by one’s own choices and actions.

I now turn to examine the theme of personal integrity as Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell present it in their stories. To do this, I compare and contrast select characters from each narrative. What I want to know is how they come to see themselves as persons, to gain a sense of purpose, and to act toward their aims. In what follows, I examine the lust for the inner ring as the challenge to Mark Studdock’s integrity in *That Hideous Strength*, restlessness as the challenge to integrity for members of the World State in *Brave New World*, and personal violation as the challenge to Winston Smith’s integrity in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

⁸ Wiesel, Preface to the New Translation, *Night*, xii, quoting a passage from the original Yiddish text of the work eventually edited and published as *Night*.

THE INNER RING AND INTEGRITY IN *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH*

Mark Studdock arrives at adulthood with one aim: esoteric knowledge. During his initiation to the N.I.C.E., however, he becomes conflicted within and realizes that he must choose the man he will be. Some of Mark's most significant moments, as he sees and weighs his choice, occur in exchanges with Professor Augustus Frost and Dr. Cecil Dimble. Mark's character is important for the choices we see him making; Frost and Dimble are important for the choices they have made. The two older men chose their allegiances long ago. In the years since, each has become deeply marked by his choice. Critically, Frost and Dimble have aligned themselves to mortally opposed sides of a cosmic conflict. Those two sides now fight for Mark's heart and mind. A comparison of these three men and their paths illuminates the theme of integrity.

Dr. Augustus Frost, who appears as a representative of the N.I.C.E. early on, plays his most important moments in the story when he attempts to complete Mark's initiation into the Institute. Like Wither, Frost is a full initiate of the N.I.C.E.⁹ He brings Mark to the Objective Room, a disproportionate room in which he directs Mark to various pointless and degraded activities. The idea of an external standard of value, Frost informs Mark, is simply a consequence of one's emotive desire to live. He rejects a "means-and-end pattern of thought which descends from Aristotle."¹⁰ Instead he promises Mark, "When you have obtained real objectivity you will recognize, not *some* motives, but *all* motives as merely animal, subjective epiphenomena." Frost makes

⁹ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 68, 296, 333.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 293.

explicit what implications his philosophy has for Mark. He tells Mark he must undergo training in objectivity “to eliminate from your mind one by one the things you have hitherto regarded as grounds for action. It is like killing a nerve. That whole system of instinctive preferences, whatever ethical, aesthetic, or logical disguise they wear, is to be simply destroyed.”¹¹

Deep into Frost’s attempt to complete his initiation, Mark finally understands his choice. He sees that Frost offers him “objectivity—the process whereby all specifically human reactions were killed in a man.”¹² The end of this training, writes Lewis, is to perfect one in “the asceticism of anti-Nature.” Mark realizes that Frost and Wither

were, in a sense, playing quite fair with him—offering him the very same initiation through which they themselves had passed and which had divided them from humanity, distending and dissipating Wither into a shapeless ruin while it condensed and sharpened Frost into the hard, bright, little needle that he now was.¹³

Once Frost had been in Studdock’s position, and he had chosen power.

Besides his efforts toward Mark’s initiation, Frost’s character is most fully revealed shortly after he leaves off his attempts to coerce Mark, in his death. We hear Frost’s thoughts as he nears death: “There were not, and must not be, such things as men.”¹⁴ Frost’s last thoughts echo Wither’s. John Wither “had willed with his whole heart that there should be no reality and no truth, and now even the imminence of his

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹² *Ibid.*, 296.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 355.

own ruin could not wake him.”¹⁵ Driven to suicide, Frost “piled all the inflammables he could think of into the Objective Room.”¹⁶ Once he has locked himself in the room and is about to end his life, he is allowed to reconsider his convictions on human nature and personal responsibility:

Not till then did his controllers allow him to suspect that death itself might not after all cure the illusion of being a soul—nay, might prove the entry into a world where that illusion raged infinite and unchecked...He became able to know (and simultaneously refused the knowledge) that he had been wrong from the beginning, that souls and personal responsibility existed. He half saw, he wholly hated...With one supreme effort, he flung himself back into his illusion.¹⁷

Augustus Frost lived his life in allegiance to the hope that persons and responsibility, including himself and his own actions, were not real.

Long ago, Dr. Cecil Dimble committed himself to choose right over power. A fellow of Northumberland, Dimble had been a tutor to Mark’s wife, Jane.¹⁸ He is a mature man who knows his allegiances. Dr. Dimble knows and loves Arthurian literature and the history of Britain, and has a fine capacity for wonder.¹⁹ Even more importantly, he has the capacity to question himself, to examine his own passions and actions. Dimble’s character is perhaps best revealed in a conversation he has with Mark. When Mark arrives at Dr. Dimble’s rooms at Northumberland, the professor, writes Lewis, is shocked by the change he sees in Mark. “Studdock’s face...had grown

¹⁵ Ibid., 350.

¹⁶ Ibid., 355.

¹⁷ Ibid., 355-356.

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹ Ibid., 280.

fatter and paler and there was a new vulgarity in the expression.”²⁰ Unmoved by all Mark’s pomp and bluster, Dimble remains honest and respectful toward him. He firmly questions Mark’s assumptions about Mark’s own character and the N.I.C.E.

At the same time, Dr. Dimble knows he struggles to be charitable toward Mark. When the young man insists that the professor dislikes him, “Dimble was silent.” Mark’s shaft, Lewis writes, “had gone home. Dimble’s conscience had for years accused him of a lack of charity towards Studdock and he had struggled to amend it: he was struggling now.”²¹ Throughout their conversation the professor wrestles an intense temptation. “Dimble was simply trying very hard not to hate, not to despise, above all, not to enjoy hating and despising, and he had no idea of the fixed severity which this effort gave to his face.”²² In Dimble’s character, Lewis shows a wise man keenly aware of the confluence of right and wrong motives that inform his actions.

The professor becomes genuinely angry and tries to cut through Studdock’s pretense and whining.²³ “‘Stop talking nonsense!’ said Dimble. ‘Stop posturing and acting, if only for a minute. Who are you to talk like that? They have corrupted better men than you or me before now.’”²⁴ When Mark says he will leave the N.I.C.E., Dimble

²⁰ Ibid., 214.

²¹ Ibid., 216.

²² Ibid., 217.

²³ Ibid., 218.

²⁴ Ibid., 219.

promises to help him if he is serious.²⁵ He wants Mark to choose the right alliance, but cannot coerce him. He is firm, but not forceful, “I am offering you a way back into the human family.”²⁶

Alone after his conversation with Mark, the elderly professor questions himself: “Did I give way to my temper? Was I self-righteous? Did I tell him as much as I dared?” He probes his own motives more deeply: “Did you fail to make things clear just because you really wanted not to? Just wanted to hurt and humiliate? To enjoy your own self-righteousness? Is there a whole Belbury inside you too?”²⁷ Throughout, Dimble is manly and humble, courageous and self-controlled.

As he journeys deeper into the N.I.C.E., Mark Studdock discovers that he must make a choice about the kind of man he will become. The very thought of acting toward something other than his lust for the inner circle unsettles him. “For,” as Lewis writes, “Mark liked to be liked.”²⁸ During his re-training in the Objective Room, Mark recognizes his own position in Frost’s philosophy. In the midst of a fear-filled and painful internal conflict, Mark begins to gain clarity. Lewis writes, “The knowledge that his own assumptions led to Frost’s position, combined with what he saw in Frost’s face and what he had experienced in this very cell, effected a complete conversion. All the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 220.

²⁷ Ibid., 221.

²⁸ Ibid., 215.

philosophers and evangelists in the world might not have done the job so neatly.”²⁹

Mark sees what Frost has become and wants to be a better man. Lewis portrays the moments of his choice beautifully:

Whether because he had already survived the attack, or because the imminence of death had drawn the tooth of his lifelong desire for the esoteric, or because he had (in a fashion) called very urgently for help, the built and painted perversity of the room had the effect of making him aware, as he had never been before, of the room’s opposite. As the desert first teaches men to love water, or as absence first reveals affection, there rose up against the background of the sour and the crooked some kind of vision of the sweet and the straight. Something else—something he vaguely called the “Normal”—apparently existed. He had never thought about it before. But there it was—solid, massive, with a shape of its own, almost like something you could touch, or eat, or fall in love with...He was not thinking in moral terms at all; or else (what is much the same thing) he was having his first deeply moral experience.” He was choosing a side: the Normal.³⁰

In the moment of his choice, Mark rejects his lust for secret knowledge and the power it promises. He abandons the path he thought would surely bring him to success. The moments of his choice are at once excruciating and freeing.

In the Objective Room, Mark gains clarity, but not the kind Frost intends. “And day by day,” Lewis tells us, “as the process went on, that idea of the Straight or the Normal which had occurred to him during his first visit to this room, grew stronger and more solid in his mind until it had become a kind of mountain.” Before, “he had always thought...[ideas] were things inside one’s own head.”³¹ His exposure to the Crooked finally convinces him otherwise. As Lewis describes it,

²⁹ Ibid., 293.

³⁰ Ibid., 296-297.

³¹ Ibid., 307.

[N]ow, when [Mark's] head was continually attacked and often completely filled with the clinging corruption of the training, this Idea towered up above him—something which obviously existed quite independent of himself and had hard rock surfaces which would not give, surfaces he could cling to.³²

Mark saw what Frost had become. He discovers what Dimble and the company at St. Anne's are for. Through intense conflict, he aligns himself with the Normal against the Crooked. Mark had committed himself to choose the delight of the real and the right over the pleasure of power. I now turn to consider three of Huxley's characters who, like Mark, must decide who they will become.

RESTLESSNESS AND INTEGRITY IN *BRAVE NEW WORLD*

In this section, I compare three of Aldous Huxley's characters in *Brave New World* as they variously pursue or refuse opportunities to gain integrity. One could conduct a similar analysis of John the Savage, his mother Linda, and Mustapha Mond. For this analysis, however, I've chosen Bernard Marx, Lenina Crowne, and Helmholtz Watson. Huxley presents these characters with special attention to their very different responses to the possibility of personal integrity.

I start my inquiry with Bernard Marx, whose struggle for integrity Huxley highlights throughout. Next, I contrast his character with Lenina Crowne's. Lenina is a high caste member who has at least as many opportunities as Bernard to gain integrity, but who consistently refuses these opportunities. Finally, I compare Bernard with his friend Helmholtz Watson, a man who strives to know himself and act accordingly.

³² Ibid.

Bernard Marx's quest for integrity distinguishes him among the characters in *Brave New World*. Bernard is different, isolated, and unsatisfied with the goals and rewards of his life as an upper-caste citizen of the World State. His story draws my attention because he finds conflict both in himself and between himself and the people and aims of his society, and undertakes a faltering but persistent quest for personal integrity.

When we meet him, Bernard lacks integrity, and feels his lack. He says to himself, "I am I, and wish I wasn't."³³ Slowly, Bernard becomes aware—inconsistently but effectively aware—that he doesn't know who he is or what he is about. He is painfully self-absorbed. Bernard's "self-consciousness," writes Huxley, "was acute and distressing." Ever unstable, he wavers between arrogance, a too-high estimation of himself, on the one hand, and, on the other, self-pity, a sulking, too-low estimation of himself.

Critically, Bernard becomes increasingly dissatisfied with his lack of purpose and weak resolve, and with the World State's promises of satisfaction through collective spirituality and sensuality. Already, his physical inferiority to most members of his caste make him an outsider.³⁴ Bernard's want of integrity and identity exacerbates his sense of alienation and loneliness. Huxley describes Bernard's growing frustration after an unsatisfying Solidarity Service: he comes starved and leaves worse—"more isolated by

³³ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 88, 137.

reason of his unreplenished emptiness, his dead satiety.”³⁵ More and more, he finds himself, “Separate and unatoned, while the others were being fused into the Greater Being; alone even in Morgana’s embrace—much more alone, indeed, more hopelessly himself than he had even been in his life before.”³⁶

Unlike most of the men around him, Bernard recognizes Hatcheries worker Lenina Crowne as a person, even though she doesn’t see herself that way. “Bernard ground his teeth. ‘Have here her, have her there. Like mutton.’”³⁷ One evening, the two go on a date. Their conversation soon reveals their quite different ideas and intentions about integrity. When Bernard proposes that they walk and talk for the evening, Lenina balks. She finds his suggestion terribly boring, and instead takes him out to socialize with a crowd gathered around wrestling and *soma* sundaes. When she presses him take a *soma* sundae, he replies, “I’d rather be myself...Myself and nasty. Not somebody else, however jolly.”³⁸

Later that night, as their helicopter hangs over crashing waves, beneath a bright moon, Bernard makes unorthodox confidences in Lenina. He shuts off the radio, despite Lenina’s protest, and looks out on the sky and sea in silence.

“I want to look at the sea in peace,” he said. “One can’t even look with that beastly noise going on.”

“But [the radio is] lovely. And I don’t want to look.”

³⁵ Ibid., 86.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 45.

³⁸ Ibid., 89.

“But I do,” he insisted. “It makes me feel as though...” he hesitated, searching for words with which to express himself, “as though I were more *me*, if you see what I mean. More on my own, not so completely a part of something else. Not just a cell in the social body. Doesn’t it make you feel like that, Lenina?”³⁹

Notably, his reflection provokes Lenina immediately to tears:

“It’s horrible, it’s horrible,” she kept repeating. “And how can you talk like that about not wanting to be a part of the social body? After all, every one works for every one else. We can’t do without any one...”⁴⁰

When Lenina reminds him that even members of the lowest caste are useful to society, he retorts with a plea on behalf of his unique personality.

“Yes, I know,” said Bernard derisively. “‘Even Epsilons are useful’! So am I. And I damned well wish I weren’t.”⁴¹

Lenina encounters opportunities to recognize herself as an individual, to choose her aims, and to act toward those goals. Her responses strikingly contrast with Bernard and Helmholtz’s choices. By habit and by choice, she refuses the risk of becoming a person. When suffering comes, she consistently checks out with *soma*. When solitude threatens, she reaches for the radio. Suffering, silence, and friendship terrify her.

In another scene from Lenina and Bernard’s night out, Lenina willingly maintains her lack of integrity. As their helicopter hovers, Bernard gives her a chance to get to know him better and to reveal herself as more than merely a body with desires.

“I thought we’d be more...more together here—with nothing but the sea and moon. More together than in that crowd, or even in my rooms. Do you understand that?”⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 91.

⁴¹ Ibid.

“I don’t understand anything,” she said with decision, determined to preserve her incomprehension intact.”⁴³

With a quick smile and eyes full of “puzzled anxiety,” Lenina consciously turns down the invitation to integrity.

Consistently, Lenina plays for the incentives of the World State, and, on the whole, she is satisfied with its rewards. She chooses to be infantile, and allows others to treat her “as though she were a bit of meat.”⁴⁴ The Savage’s self-restraint strengthens her attraction to him. Lenina eventually discovers that she has developed an unshakable attachment to him.⁴⁵ Still, she refuses to act on her dissatisfaction. Instead, typically, she takes *soma* and follows the Arch-Community-Songster.⁴⁶

Unlike Lenina, Bernard wants and tries to become an individual with purpose. He is an ordinary man, failing, but sometimes brave and sometimes trying. Alone with Lenina, Bernard boldly questions the program the World State’s directors have set for people like himself: “Adults intellectually and during working hours, [but infants] where feeling and desire are concerned.”⁴⁷ He confides to Lenina, “It suddenly struck me the other day...that it might be possible to be an adult all the time.” Bernard continues his experiments with activities he thinks might cultivate his own maturity. To that end, he

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 187-188, 257.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 176.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 94.

enjoys solitude, continues his friendship with Helmholtz, and plans a trip to see the Indian Reservation at Malpais. Just before his trip, Bernard braces to meet with the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning. He needs to claim his travel permit, and expects the Director's disapproval.

To be sure, the Director warns Bernard. He claims that he has authority to redirect Bernard's activities outside of work hours because Bernard's unorthodoxy will reflect poorly on the Center for Hatcheries and Conditioning. "My workers must be above suspicion, particularly those of the highest castes," he admonishes.⁴⁸ "Alphas are so conditioned that they do not have to be infantile in their emotional behaviour. But that is all the more reason for their making a special effort to conform. It is their duty to be infantile, even against their inclination."

The directors of the World State want citizens melded into unity, stable and passive. The citizen with a sense of individuality, purpose, and agency threatens the legitimacy and order of the World State. As the Director later explains, "Unorthodoxy threatens more than the life of a mere individual; it strikes at Society itself."⁴⁹

What, then, are the key moments for Bernard Marx? For most of his story, his flashes of self-awareness come as moments of shame after the fact, rather than moments of reflection or self-restraint before he talks or acts.⁵⁰ Bernard wants to be brave and experience life as he encounters it, but he often disappoints himself. The

⁴⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 148.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Ibid., 99, 178, 180.

shame he feels for his failures motivates him to redouble his efforts “to show himself strong and unorthodox.”⁵¹

While Bernard is largely anxious and fearful throughout, certain moments become key junctures as he strives for integrity, takes risks, and refuses the more comfortable path of compliance.⁵² His first attempts at solitude are especially noteworthy in light of his weakness. Early in the story, blushing yet brave, he recommends a quiet walk and talk to Lenina.⁵³ Near the end, he is scared and pretending to help John and Helmholtz at the Park Lane Hospital riot. While he can barely keep himself from running away, he finally chooses to remain loyal to the Savage and Watson.⁵⁴ When he is assigned to an island, he faces his destiny with “determined resignation.”⁵⁵ As he prepares to depart, he apologizes to John for his cowardly actions, and receives John’s forgiveness. Huxley writes,

“And by the way, John,” he continued, leaning forward in his chair and laying a hand on the Savage’s knee, “I want to say how sorry I am about everything that happened yesterday.” He blushed. “How ashamed,” he went on, in spite of the unsteadiness in his voice, “how really...”

The Savage cut him short and, taking his hand affectionately pressed it.⁵⁶

Bernard becomes more courageous as he conducts an often weak but nobly persistent fight to be an individual in a society whose members deny distinction.

⁵¹ Ibid., 111, 182.

⁵² Ibid., 217, 226.

⁵³ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 242.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 242.

The interaction and contrast between Huxley's characters Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson, in particular, illuminates the importance of friendship in the quest for personal integrity. When we meet him, Helmholtz is a man with a sense of purpose, and a few important questions. Huxley does not tell us much about Helmholtz's earlier experiences. As we watch him, however, we see that he is reflective and takes risks.⁵⁷ He cultivates habits that distinguish him as a thoughtful actor. When he realizes his dissatisfaction with the activities and rewards that belong to his station in the World State, he pauses to reevaluate his own goals and actions. He searches for more satisfying purposes for his work and life.⁵⁸

Throughout his friendship with Bernard, we see Helmholtz cringe for his friend's weak character. He is ashamed for Bernard's self-pity and wishes Bernard would "show a little more pride."⁵⁹ He hates Bernard's alternating boasting and self-loathing, and his habit of exaggerating his boldness and presence of mind to himself and to others after the event. "He hated these things—just because he liked Bernard."⁶⁰ By turns, Bernard recognizes, admires, and resents Helmholtz's integrity. In the midst of his rise to fame (by association with the Savage), Bernard initiates a major rift with Helmholtz. When Bernard subsequently realizes his error, Helmholtz restores him to friendship without

⁵⁷ Ibid., 68-71 and 180-182.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 86 (see Chapter 3 above).

⁵⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 99.

reproach.⁶¹ Instead of receiving Helmholtz's forgiveness with gratitude, Bernard reacts with a mix of pleasure and annoyance. Huxley writes,

Touched, Bernard felt himself at the same time humiliated by this magnanimity—a magnanimity the more extraordinary and therefore more humiliating in that it owed nothing to *soma* and everything to Helmholtz's character. It was the Helmholtz of daily life who forgot and forgave, not the Helmholtz of the half-gramme holiday.⁶²

Bernard's volatile reactions to Helmholtz come out of his own conflicted character and imbalanced estimate of himself. Helmholtz, by contrast, maintains a usually balanced evaluation of himself.

Eventually, Watson's actions get him a ticket to an island. After joining the Savage in the riot at Park Lane Hospital, he is brought before Mond. Helmholtz listens as the Controller describes his assignment to an island for individuals. For people who know themselves as persons, being sent to an island, Mond says, is a reward. An island, he says, offers,

the most interesting set of men and women to be found anywhere in the world. All the people who, for one reason or another have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community life. All the people who aren't satisfied with orthodoxy, who've got independent ideas of their own. Every one, in a word, who's any one.⁶³

Unlike Lenina, Bernard and Helmholtz know themselves as individuals and hunger for purpose, and attend to that hunger. As Huxley has World Controller Mustapha Mond explain, purpose is a dangerous concept. Mond writes across the front

⁶¹ Ibid., 179.

⁶² Ibid., 180.

⁶³ Ibid., 227.

page of a paper he deems unsafe for publication, “The author’s mathematical treatment of the conception of purpose is novel and highly ingenious, but heretical and, so far as the present social order is concerned, dangerous and potentially subversive. *Not to be published.*” He considers the work excellent; it simply articulates an unacceptably potent truth. Huxley lets us in on the Controller’s thoughts:

But once you began admitting explanations in terms of purpose—well, you didn’t know what the result might be. It was the sort of idea that might easily decondition the more unsettled minds among the higher castes—make them lose their faith in happiness as the Sovereign Good and take to believing, instead, that the goal was somewhere beyond, somewhere outside the present human sphere; that the purpose of life was not the maintenance of well-being, but some intensification and refining of consciousness, some enlargement of knowledge. Which was, the Controller reflected, quite possibly true. But not, in the present circumstance, admissible.⁶⁴

The longing for purpose motivates the quest for integrity. Mond does all he can to keep citizens from naming or seeking to satisfy that longing.

Lastly, there is one particularly noteworthy feature of Huxley’s treatment of integrity. Namely, Huxley portrays characters that strive for integrity as characters that have friends. The persons who recognize themselves as individuals, distinct from the social body, have friends. In fact, in the closing scenes, Huxley highlights friendship as the mark of Bernard, Helmholtz, and John’s growth as persons. These three characters form friendships with one another that strengthen and stabilize one another. By contrast, Lenina lacks friendship—she likes to be in a crowd, but avoids meaningful conversation. She does not know others and she does not know herself. Thus Huxley highlights the point that integrity is an undertaking best accomplished with friends.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 177.

Winston Smith, Orwell's hero, to whom I next turn, must navigate a world of terrifying uncertainty and distrust as he struggles for integrity.

VIOLATION AND INTEGRITY IN *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR*

Like C.S. Lewis, George Orwell places his hero inside the organization that holds political power. Like Lewis's character Mark, Orwell's hero Winston Smith undergoes severe manipulation and coercion by agents of the regime. Orwell, however, gives a more sustained and detailed account of the experience of personal violation. My intent in this section is to examine the risk and demands of the task of personal integrity by following Winston Smith's journey. I contrast Winston with his neighbor, Comrade Parsons, and his interrogator, O'Brien, in their responses to the unbounded claims of the Party's orthodoxy.

First, I describe Winston's conduct in the tension between the orthodoxy the Party imposes, on the one hand, and his own experience, on the other. Winston lives in a regime that compels cooperation and disallows individual identity and initiative. He struggles under the pressure of Party orthodoxy as it conflicts with and the claims of his own common sense. An ordinary man set apart by his thoughtfulness, Winston tries to maintain his identity as a person capable of thought, affection, and action.

Orwell describes Winston's repeated, intense experience of the conflict between the Party's contrived reality and the evidence of his own memory and senses. He experiences the force of Party orthodoxy as an invasion of his person: "It was as though some huge force were pressing down upon you—something that penetrated inside your

skull, battering against your brain, frightening you out of your beliefs, persuading you, almost, to deny the evidence of your senses.”⁶⁵ The absorbing force of Party orthodoxy violates Winston’s mind and affections.

In one disturbingly well-written scene, Orwell shows the Party’s reach into Winston’s thoughts and passions. As Winston writes in his diary, he recollects the morning’s Two Minutes Hate, the daily ritual that stokes Department workers to a frenzy of screeching hatred. For Winston, “The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in.”⁶⁶ The Hate plunges him into the crowd’s furor against his will, and subjects his soul to adore Big Brother. It fuels a passion he manages to turn, for a brief moment, against Big Brother, and then, in an instant, wrenches him back into affection for the dictator. The Hate plays on the orthodoxy that haunts Winston’s soul, the orthodoxy that makes Emmanuel Goldstein, leader of the clandestine resistance to the regime, seem “capable by the mere power of his voice of wrecking the structure of civilization.”⁶⁷ Through Winston’s memory, Orwell recreates the experience of emotional manipulation with piercing accuracy.

In another scene, Orwell represents the Party’s invasive force in a description of a picture of Big Brother staring at Winston from the frontispiece of a history book. “It was as though some huge force were pressing down upon you—something that

⁶⁵ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 83.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

penetrated inside your skull, battering against your brain, frightening you out of your beliefs, persuading you, almost, to deny the evidence of your senses.”⁶⁸ Worse—and the reality that highlights Winston’s courage in choosing to resist the regime—is his unshakeable awareness that, ultimately, the Party will shatter him. He knows the force that penetrates his skull will destroy his mind. “In the end the Party would announce that two and two made five, and you would have to believe it.”

Winston grasps the Party’s fundamental opposition to the common world—the world we can discover and discuss together. “Not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality, was tacitly denied by their philosophy. The heresy of heresies was common sense.”⁶⁹ The Party’s power and persistent denial of the reality he knows torment Winston. His assurance that two and two make four melts into certainty that the Party will make him believe that two and two make five. His next thought thrusts him into the most disturbing and overwhelming part of the cycle of manipulation: “And what was terrifying was not that they would kill you for thinking otherwise, but that they might be right.”⁷⁰

Two irreconcilable narratives pull a man born into a world that the Party claims is a world without history. “The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command.”⁷¹ Against this command, Winston’s

⁶⁸ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 83-84.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 84.

⁷¹ Ibid.

courage surges. His is the brave resistance of an ordinary man, faltering but trying.

“They were wrong and he was right. The obvious, the silly and the true had got to be defended.”⁷² In Winston’s inner turmoil, Orwell shows us how the Party violates Winston’s mind in a relentless effort to compel submission to the goals of those who give orders in Oceania.

The Party molds men into masses by making solitude impossible and atomization inescapable. Winston reflects on the Party’s near total violation of personal boundaries. “Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed—no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull.”⁷³ For the Party, isolation is key to manipulation. Orwell describes the “locked loneliness” in which Winston lives.⁷⁴ He writes,

In principle a Party member had no spare time, and was never alone except in bed. It was assumed that when he was not working, eating or sleeping he would be taking part in some kind of communal recreation: to do anything that suggested a taste for solitude, even to go for a walk by yourself, was always slightly dangerous. There was a word for it in Newspeak: *ownlife*, it was called, meaning individualism and eccentricity.⁷⁵

Atomization, as Winston senses, is a violation of integrity. He resists being sunk into the shouting, suffering mass. Instead, Winston discovers that his task is to stay human. He makes choices, on his own and in relationship with Julia, to resist the Party’s orthodoxy in favor of his own common sense and experience.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 85.

As a member of the Outer Party who yet strives to be a person, Winston Smith experiences a tension that tears at his soul, wearies his mind, and exhausts his body. As his story continues, Winston sees that,

What was happening was only the working-out of a process that had started years ago. The first step had been a secret, involuntary thought, the second had been the opening of the diary. He had moved from thoughts to words, and now from words to actions. The last step was something that would happen in the Ministry of Love. He had accepted it. The end was contained in the beginning.⁷⁶

In the depths of the tension between the Party and reality as he knows it, Winston realizes, as previously noted, that “the object was not to stay alive but to stay human.”⁷⁷

Winston chooses integrity, knowing as he chooses that it will cost him his life.

Winston’s neighbor Parsons, by contrast, does not seem to experience any conflict between his own thoughts and the Party’s demands—at least, as far as the reader can see, not in any way that compels him to act against the regime. Since boyhood, Parsons has unreflectively calibrated himself to the goals the Party sets for people like him; he has been absorbed, by turns, in the activities of the Spies, the Youth League, the Sports Committee, the Community Center, and the Ministry of Truth. At thirty-five, he is a “fattish but active man of paralyzing stupidity, a mass of imbecile enthusiasms—one of those on whom, more even than on the Thought Police, the stability of the Party depended.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ibid., 166.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 214.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 24.

At lunch in the canteen one day, Parsons listens to of the Party's broadcast of its latest achievements with "gaping solemnity" and "edified boredom."⁷⁹ Winston looks around to see if everyone around him will accept the Party's claims, which clearly contradict its pledges the previous day. Orwell writes, "Parsons swallowed it easily, with the stupidity of an animal."⁸⁰ Parsons excels in thoughtless compliance, but lacks the qualities of a citizen. Citizenship requires initiative, healthy independence, and concern for the wellbeing of others. The Party, however, does not require thought and care. Rather, as Winston's observations confirm, the Party whittles away at its subjects' capacity to think and care, so that, with nothing else to live and die for, they are more easily absorbed into the Party's aims. In short, the Party politicizes everything but undermines citizenship.⁸¹ Worse, still, in the process the Party deadens in most of its subjects the capacity to act toward any goal save those it establishes.

Eventually, the Thought Police capture Winston. Through a program of physical torture and emotional and intellectual manipulation, O'Brien works to break Winston. In particular, O'Brien attacks Winston's capacity to recollect what he has seen and done. "How can you control memory?" Winston protests in a moment of strength. "You have not controlled mine!"⁸² Ruthlessly, O'Brien hammers away at Winston's confidence in the world of common sense.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁸¹ Ibid., 77.

⁸² Ibid., 261.

You believe that reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right. You also believe that the nature of reality is self-evident...Whatever the Party holds to be truth, *is* truth. It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party. That is the fact you have got to re-learn, Winston. It needs an act of self-destruction, and effort of the will.⁸³

Winston strives for integrity. O'Brien demands self-destruction for the sake of the Party. He demands that Winston lose himself to the Party for the sake of power—because the Party, he says, is greater and more enduring than any one person. Like Winston, O'Brien had a choice. He chose power.

In torment, Winston struggles for his sanity. "What could you do, thought Winston, against the lunatic who is more intelligent than yourself, who gives your arguments a fair hearing and then simply persists in his lunacy?"⁸⁴ O'Brien mocks Winston, telling him that metaphysics is not his strong suit. But Winston, a man who for years has tried to be human, knows that a system founded in continual pursuit of the thrill of power cannot survive forever. "It is impossible to found a civilization on fear and hatred and cruelty. It would never endure."⁸⁵ Even when O'Brien's voice "had battered Winston helpless," the man speaks against the nightmare O'Brien praises. "And yet," Orwell writes,

he could not keep silent. Feebly, without arguments, with nothing to support him except his inarticulate horror of what O'Brien had said, he returned the attack.

"I don't know—I don't care. Somehow you will fail. Something will defeat you. Life will defeat you."⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 275.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 281.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 282.

As his story closes, Winston is shattered, as he knew he would be. “He had won the victory over himself,” Orwell writes. “He loved Big Brother.”⁸⁷ In truth, however, Winston does not. He has been tortured, mind, soul and body. O’Brien has denied Winston Smith’s personhood and agency. Love, as Winston witnessed it in his mother and in the care Julia evokes from him, is demonstrated in choice and actions. It is not real unless freely chosen, freely committed, and freely practiced. In forcing Winston to “love” Big Brother, O’Brien has denied and deeply bruised Winston’s capacity to love at all.

Through their stories, Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell show that developing a sense and practice of personal integrity is basic to becoming an accountable actor. To be a responsible person, you first have to be a person. Their narratives show that the effort to be a whole person, who is oriented toward distinct goals and resistant to the pressure other people exert on behalf of contrary goals, entails risk and conflict. It is an ongoing journey, in which men sometimes fail, or are subject to overwhelming pressure from others. Integrity is costly. And yet—in the contrast between characters who live in integrity and those who live in subjection to the arbitrary will of others—each of the stories shows that integrity is attractive. For, each story shows that integrity is essential to a truly satisfying life.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 311.

CHAPTER 5 FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL SOCIETY

“The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power...We are different from all the other oligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing.”

- O’Brien, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*¹

INTRODUCTION

My intent in this chapter is to show how the protagonists in *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, respectively, discover and challenge the lust for order that the rulers the World State, the N.I.C.E., and Oceania, respectively, have established as the foundation and goal of their political society. Rulers in each regime assert objectives, and corollary claims of authority over individuals, that the hero must challenge in order to satisfy the human obligations he senses. In each story, the hero finds that the lust for order is toxic to the dignity of persons and, ultimately, to the possibility of political community. In what follows, I want to briefly describe the conflict between the protagonist and his political oppressors. Next, I show how each novel details the hero’s resistance to aims that undermine human purpose and genuine political society. Lastly, I will compare and evaluate the accounts given in each novel.

BEAUTY OF ORDER AND ABUSE OF POWER

There is a literature of the beauty of order that extends from Plato to Hobbes. As works of art and political thought, *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and

¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 275.

Nineteen Eighty-Four contribute to that line of inquiry as they portray rulers who value order above all else. In each novel, the hero discovers that, underlying certain men's aims for the state and its citizens, there is an attempt to secure order for the sake of order and power for the sake of power. In short, while our heroes appreciate the significance and beauty of order, they come into conflict with those who embody an overzealous and inordinate desire for order.

To be sure, each hero appreciates the need for order as an essential condition of political community. None of our heroes are anarchists; none desires to overthrow political authority as such. In fact, it is through the protagonists, more than through those who oppress them for the sake of order, that the reader gains an appreciation for a well-ordered society—a society that preserves peace, respects persons, and facilitates the pursuit of human goods. Even more importantly, it is through John the Savage, Winston Smith, Mark Studdock, and Jane Studdock that we glimpse various visions of cosmic order.

At the same time, these protagonists find that when a society aims primarily at order through control, its members become increasingly blind to the very things that make human life worth living. In the sections that follow, I describe the conversation, present in all three stories, in which those in power reveal their goals for political society. In *Brave New World*, World Controller Mustapha Mond explains the foundations of the World State to John the Savage, Helmholtz Watson, and, while he can stand it, Bernard Marx. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, O'Brien tells Winston Smith about the Party's program of a society based on the continual achievement of power. Under

duress, Winston responds. In *That Hideous Strength*, the conversation unfolds in segments. First, at dinner three men (Winter, Filastro, and Gould) discuss the real aims of the N.I.C.E. with potential N.I.C.E. initiate, Mark Studdock. Another principal character, Ransom, later returns to the same themes. Toward the conclusion of the story, there is a conversation between members of the company at St. Anne's regarding the aims and characters of nations. Throughout, Jane Studdock struggles with the tension between her desires for individual autonomy, on the one hand, and for significance, on the other.

Huxley draws out the contrast between stability, on the one hand, and the potential for real happiness, a posture toward life that entails both suffering and satisfaction, on the other. While his account is perhaps the most prescient portrayal of the use of technology to subdue uncertainty, it fails to explore the motives that drive men to pursue stability at the cost of more profound sources of human significance and satisfaction. To his novel I now turn.

STABILITY, SATISFACTION, AND SUFFERING

The world Huxley's reader first meets in the Hatcheries and Conditioning Center, and then through the Savage's eyes as he lives in London, is built on the aims of the directors of the World State. Mustapha Mond, one of the World Controllers, reveals these aims in a conversation with the Savage, Helmholtz, and Bernard. The goal is social stability—a shallow and false happiness that fits into a predictable world and quells the

real passion, satisfaction and suffering, that comes with genuine human experience. As Mond says, “The world’s stable now.”² He continues,

People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get. They’re well off; they’re safe; they’re never ill; they’re not afraid of death; they’re blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they’re plagued with no mothers or fathers; they’ve got no wives or children or lovers to feel strongly about; they’re so conditioned that they practically can’t help behaving as they ought to behave. And if anything should go wrong, there’s *soma*.

Mond censures the Savage for jeopardizing this stability “in the name of liberty, Mr. Savage. *Liberty!*”³ Against John’s quest for meaning, the World Controller explains that the directors of the World State are pursuing a lower, but more stable standard for human welfare. He says, “Our Ford himself did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness.”⁴ Those in power made this decision, Mond emphasizes, in an attempt to quiet the deadly political chaos that characterized the modern world in the previous era. The trade-offs seemed justified: “What’s the point of truth or beauty or knowledge when the anthrax bombs are popping all around you?” People wanted order restored. “Anything for a quiet life.” Once established, the project continued to develop along the lines of its own logic. Mond explains to John and Watson, “We’ve gone on controlling ever since. It hasn’t been very good for truth, of course. But it’s been very good for happiness. One can’t have something for nothing.”⁵

² Huxley, *Brave New World*, 220.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The exchange of significance for stability is easy—unless, as the Savage maintains, humans really are meant for more and accountable for our lives. In fact, the Savage asks whether our sense of getting away with stability and comfort as our highest personal and political goal is really our punishment. When Watson leaves for exile to an island of individuals, Mustapha Mond shares with the Savage a passage from Cardinal John Henry Newman. Importantly, Mond himself is confident in his own ability and authority to define the parameters for his own action as he does for citizens of the World State. He informs John, for example, “But as I make the laws here, I can break them.”⁶ However, Mond reads to John a quite different perspective from Newman.

He opened the book at the place marked by a slip of paper and began to read. “We are not our own any more than what we possess is our own. We did not make ourselves, we cannot be supreme over ourselves. We are not our own masters. We are God’s property. Is it not our happiness thus to view the matter? Is it any happiness or any comfort, to consider that we *are* our own? It may be thought so by the young and prosperous. These may think it a great thing to have everything, as they suppose, their own way—to depend on no one—to have to think of nothing out of sight, to be without the irksomeness of continual acknowledgement, continual prayer, continual reference of what they ought to do to the will of another. But as time goes on, they, as all men, will find that independence was not made for man—that it is an unnatural state—will do for a while, but will not carry us on safely to the end.”⁷

As their conversation continues, the Savage questions Mond’s assurance that he and fellow members of the brave new world can successfully redefine men’s purpose and order political society accordingly. He draws on a scene from Shakespeare with which Mond seems to be familiar:

⁶ Ibid., 219.

⁷ Ibid., 232. The excerpt is from Newman’s “Sermon 6: Remembrance of Past Mercies,” in vol. 5, *Works of John Henry Newman*. The National Institute for Newman Studies, 2007. Available at <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume5/sermon6.html>. Retrieved on August 2, 2014.

“Do you remember that bit in King Lear?” said the Savage at last. “The gods are just and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us.”

When Mond reassures him that men really can define the meaning of their existence—that “Providence takes its cue from men”—the Savage continues to question him. “The gods are just. Haven’t they used his pleasant vices as an instrument to degrade him?” The Savage starts with an assumption much closer to Newman’s—namely, that “value dwells not in a particular will,” but is given to men—while Mond, by contrast, insists that men can invent new values at will.⁸

In the face of political chaos, the directors of the World State choose to sacrifice beauty, truth, and genuine happiness for the sake of stability and admittedly shallow pleasures. As Mond sums it, “We prefer to do things comfortably.”⁹ Against this narrow world, the Savage declares that he will hold onto a more fully human existence. He replies, “But I don’t want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin.”¹⁰ In claiming the right to be unhappy, he clings to the possibility of being more truly happy and more fully human.

THE HUMAN SPIRIT AND A MERCILESS WORLD

Notably, Orwell makes O’Brien speak most clearly when it matters most. Toward the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, O’Brien gives the real motive for the Party’s program: power is erotic. As he endures O’Brien’s torture, Winston anticipates that O’Brien will

⁸ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 236.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

offer a clichéd dictator’s defense of power. He expects his tormentor to say that the Party concentrates and exercises power for the good of the majority.¹¹ However, O’Brien bluntly states the Party’s aims to Winston: “The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power.”¹² By making O’Brien describe the Party’s aims in the clearest possible terms, Orwell allows his characters and readers to wrestle more directly with the nature and consequences of a regime designed to achieve a recurring thrill of power. O’Brien says to Winston, “We are different from all the oligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing.”¹³ By casting O’Brien as a Party agent who understands the true nature of the Party’s endeavor, Orwell deals directly with the nature of power, and allows us to watch as Winston does the same.

Orwell has O’Brien describe the nature of the regime Winston has been formed by, questioned, and tried to resist. The Party agent affirms, “Power is not a means, it is an end.”¹⁴ He goes on to explain two essential features of power to Winston.

The first feature illuminates the Party’s attempts to erase personal identity. Winston waits for another jolt of electricity to rip through his being. “The first thing you must realize,” O’Brien says, “is that power is collective. The individual only has power in

¹¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 274.

¹² *Ibid.*, 275.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

so far as he ceases to be an individual.”¹⁵ Individuals die. Death, says O’Brien “is the greatest of all failures.”¹⁶ He tells Winston the way to overcome the death to which every individual eventually comes. “But if he can make complete, utter submission, if he can escape from his identity, if he can merge himself in the Party so that he *is* the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal.”¹⁷

The next feature of power O’Brien describes helps explain why the Party’s agents are most interested in the thoughts and habits of those under its command. “The second thing for you to realize,” he says, is that power is power over human beings.”¹⁸ The Party’s agents are driven by an inherently unlimited lust for power. Accordingly, they primarily want power not over mere nature, but over human beings. The way to exercise power over persons is to compel them to disbelieve the evidence of common sense and their own experience. Party agents therefore want to control the whole person, mind and body and soul.

The motive that drives Party agents—the insatiable motive that O’Brien thinks will ensure the Party’s everlasting dominance—is the thrill of power. He mocks Winston: “always there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler. Always, at every moment, there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., 276-277.

¹⁶ Ibid., 277.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

What, then, is the essence of power's attraction? The thrill of power is the thrill of unlimited and unaccountable mastery over other persons. First, the thrill of power depends on its unlimited exercise. Unlimited power violates the moral, intellectual, emotional, or physical boundaries of another. The mark of power achieved is making another person conform their will to yours, against their own will. In other words, to make someone do what you want them to do when they have no reason or inclination of their own to do so. When a man makes another human act against his own reason, affections, and inclinations, against all his internal guides to action, that man coerces the other to abandon his own identity in submission. The man who seeks to dominate must strip the other person of his identity in order to absorb that person into the identity of the one exercising power. In short, power denies agency.

Moreover, the thrill of power depends on its unaccountable exercise—it is an exercise of force in which the agent answers to no one. Importantly, those who abuse power do not deny nature; rather, they attempt to re-make it. O'Brien says there is no human nature. But he exults in shattering and re-making nature. The thrill of dominion is not in denying nature, but in re-making nature. If one's aim is the excitement of exerting control over humans, then the ability to break and re-make human nature would be evidence of ultimate power. O'Brien hammers the point to Winston:

“How does one man assert his power over another, Winston?”²⁰
Winston thought. “By making him suffer,” he said.
“Exactly,” [said O'Brien.] “By making him suffer. Obedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will

¹⁹ Ibid., 280.

²⁰ Ibid., 279.

and not his own? Power is inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in shapes of your own choosing.”²¹

What Winston gets at and holds to, even if he cannot directly express it, is that the conflict between the agents of the Party and the human beings they want to control is *not* merely a battle of wills. If the conflict was merely a conflict of wills, then O’Brien would be right: if the test is solely a test of power, then whoever lasts the longest wins. But Winston is on to the truth. The contest is not merely one of power. Winston knows that even when O’Brien breaks his will, the right, “the obvious, the silly and the true” will stand.

Critically, the reality Winston clings to reminds him that an increasingly merciless society cannot endure. In Winston, Orwell shows us a man who is human enough to know that a system based on the thrill of power is so contrary to human nature that it cannot endure. O’Brien describes to Winston the kind of world the Party’s agents are creating: “A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will not grow less but *more* merciless as it refines itself.”²² Yet Winston has experiences that tell him that an increasingly merciless society cannot endure.

Mercy is love that does not stop. Winston’s limited experience of mercy is his mother’s love. He remembers his mother as a woman who “possessed a kind of nobility, a kind of purity, simply because the standards that she obeyed were private

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

ones.”²³ Her standard for action, he reflects, is not efficacy, but meaning. This standard enables her to love her children when they do not want or reciprocate her love, and when she is powerless to change their material circumstances. In her mind, “If you loved someone, you loved him, and when you had nothing else to give, you still gave him love.”²⁴

To promise and practice a commitment to the good of another is beyond rationality, and makes us human. “The terrible thing that the Party had done,” Winston realizes one night in bed with Julia, “was to persuade you that mere impulses, mere feelings, were of no account, while at the same time robbing you of power over the material world.”²⁵ When Winston remembers his mother’s love, he remembers a world where people “were not loyal to a party or a country or an idea, they were loyal to one another.”²⁶ In the next instant, he sees the humanity of the proles. They “had stayed human...They had held on to the primitive emotions which he himself had to re-learn by conscious effort.”²⁷

Further, when Winston remembers affection and inclination and unstopping love, he gains a new standard for success. The “object,” he realizes anew, is “not to stay alive, but to stay human.”²⁸ To be human, he concludes, requires one to honor the

²³ Ibid., 171.

²⁴ Ibid., 171-172.

²⁵ Ibid., 172.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 174.

inclinations and affections one discovers in oneself. The agents of the Party “could lay bare in the utmost detail everything that you had done or said or thought; but the inner heart, whose workings were mysterious even to yourself, remained impregnable.”²⁹

Even before he remembers his mother’s love, Winston had already begun to experience the mysterious workings of the inner heart as his aggressive lust for Julia was transformed into affection. One day, when he had been caught in a flash of possessive anger against Julia, she reached toward him and “gave the tips of his fingers a quick squeeze that seemed to invite not desire but affection.”³⁰ For the first time in the story, Winston’s capacity for affection is re-awakened. He begins to care about her for her own sake, instead of as “a physical necessity, something that he not only wanted by felt he had a right to.” For the first time, he glimpses the nature of committed, daily love. In that moment, “a deep tenderness, such as he had not felt for her before, suddenly took hold of him. He wished they were a married couple of ten years’ standing.”

Winston had been a merciless child, cruel toward his mother and baby sister, and yet his mother loved him. Winston had been a merciless man, until in relationship with Julia he began to learn to love. Through these relationships, Winston has been loved and awakened to the knowledge that respect for the mysterious workings of the inner heart is the mark of humanity. He knows that an increasingly merciless society commits suicide.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 146.

Importantly, O'Brien says the Party is making a world that grows increasingly merciless "as it refines itself."³¹ But Winston knows that a world cannot refine itself. Rather, men make choices: the Party's agents have been malformed by their own will or by the will of others, into agents of the Party who implement its perverse practices. Some, like O'Brien, are self-consciously driven by lust for power; some, like Parsons, are less consciously driven by habit and fear, because the Party has ensured that the patterns of their workdays, meals, relationships, and passions deadens their capacity to imagine or act differently.

As he battles the disorienting force of O'Brien's physical and mental violence, Winston affirms all he knows: "I don't know—I don't care. Somehow you will fail. Something will defeat you. Life will defeat you."³² When O'Brien defines "Humanity" as members of the Party, Winston clings to what he has learned about humanity. He promises O'Brien that the "spirit of Man" will destroy the Party.

Stunningly, in siding with human allegiances against the Party, Winston has actually aligned himself to the thing O'Brien clutches for: to be part of something great that endures beyond the short reach of one's own short life. It is Winston, not O'Brien, who is most truly a member of something great that endures beyond the short reach of one's own life. O'Brien clutches for power because he thinks it will endure. Winston holds onto being human—being a person, being committed not to an idea or a party, but to other persons.

³¹ Ibid., 279.

³² Ibid., 282.

REAL LIFE IS MEETING

Like Aldous Huxley, C.S. Lewis shows his reader a political society in which men clutch for power through bureaucracy and biotechnology. The N.I.C.E. aims to overcome death by overcoming organic life. As Filostrato says to Mark, the real goal is to become free of nature. Like Orwell's Party agent O'Brien, the directors of the N.I.C.E. understand that the essential test of absolute power is the ability to re-make the meaning of persons and political society. Accordingly, Filostrato explains to Mark that the Institute is not primarily for "housing and vaccinations and faster trains and curing the people of cancer." Fundamentally, he explains, it is for the conquest of nature.

It is for the conquest of death: or for the conquest of organic life, if you prefer. They are the same thing. It is to bring out of that cocoon of organic life which sheltered the babyhood of mind the New Man, the man who will not die, the artificial man, free from Nature. Nature is the ladder we have climbed up by, now we kick her away.³³

The Institute's intent is to rule over men and to re-make them so that they are fit for a world that is no longer susceptible to the passions and ills of organic life. Lewis shows in *That Hideous Strength*, as he does in *The Abolition of Man*, that the attempt to conquer nature ends ultimately in the destruction of men. As Filostrato confirms to Studdock, "You know as well as I do that Man's power over Nature means the power of some men over other men with Nature as the instrument. There is no such thing as Man—it is a word. There are only men."³⁴ Lewis shows that the attempt to subdue and

³³ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 174.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

standardize human nature by force, particularly through the abuse of biotechnology, harms individual persons.

Lewis's character Ransom explains the poisonous nature of the lust for total control. Like Mond, Ransom notes that men have chosen power over truth: "Despair of objective truth had been increasingly insinuated into the scientists; indifference to it, and a concentration upon mere power, had been the result."³⁵ This choice bears consequences for daily life.

"You do not understand," he said. "The poison was brewed in these West lands but it has spat itself everywhere by now. However far you went you would find these machines, the crowded cities, the empty thrones, the false writings, the barren beds: men maddened with false promises and soured with true miseries, worshipping the iron works of their own hands, cut off from Earth their mother and from the Father in Heaven."³⁶

What Ransom means is that men's desire for control plays out as an ongoing Babel project, in which individuals and entire societies attempt to use knowledge and technology to overcome the limitations of human nature. The trouble, however, is that because they deny their true nature, men find themselves more dissatisfied than ever.

Eventually, as we have seen, Mark recognizes this reality and is converted away from the lust for power that drives the N.I.C.E. and its political program. He sees that arbitrary and unlimited power consumes those it attracts. His transformation is fascinating, and a point of focus in the previous chapter. I want to turn now to the other hero in *That Hideous Strength*, Jane Studdock.

³⁵ Ibid., 200.

³⁶ Ibid., 290.

Jane's story is especially important because, like Mark, Jane is converted away from the lust for individual autonomy. Perhaps even more fully than Mark, however, she discovers that only when we have put down the lust for power are we free to live significant lives. Jane learns that her grasping for individual autonomy cripples her quest for meaning. Only as she becomes open to unpredictability and risk is she freed for relationship and joy. While Jane's story is less explicitly political than Mark's, she discovers the same choice between certainty through power, on the one hand, and meaning in the midst of unpredictability, on the other, that all of the protagonists in our stories find and face. Through their separate journeys, both Mark and Jane discover the themes and experiences that give meaning to life, and at once validate and transcend politics. Like Winston and John, they learn that persons and political communities act quite differently depending on whether they think the main purpose of their existence is survival, or whether they have goals higher than mere survival.

Lastly, I note that Lewis draws out the idea that individuals and nations alike are formed by their choices to pursue power or to pursue right. Critically, he rejects the idea, popular among many theorists of modernity, that there is a single form of political society toward which all societies must progress if they are progressing at all. Ransom explains,

You see, MacPhee, if one is thinking simply of goodness in the abstract, one soon reaches the fatal idea of something standardized—some common kind of life to which all nations ought to progress. Of course, there are universal rules to which all goodness must conform. But that's only the grammar of virtue. It's not there that the sap is...The whole work of healing Tellus [Earth] depends on nursing that little spark, on incarnating that ghost, which is still alive in every real people, and different in each. When Logres really dominates Britain, when the goddess

Reason, the divine clearness, is really enthroned in France, when the order of Heaven is really followed in China—why, then it will be spring.³⁷

In short, while the grammar of virtue is the same, the spark of goodness present and awaiting development in each nation takes on diverse incarnations.

CONCLUSION

Through their novels, Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell invite us to examine the relationship between power and passion—or stability and passion, or control and affection, or power and love—as a fundamental tension that at once shapes and transcends politics. All three novelists warn that human attempts at control cannot save us—indeed, that human efforts to secure control by applying the strongest of our technologies are more likely to destroy than to save us. Huxley, Lewis, and Orwell all focus on the conflict between power and passion, and yet offer different depths of analysis with regard to how this tension bears on politics. My goal, in what follows, has not been to provide a comprehensive account of Huxley, Lewis, or Orwell’s political theory. Instead, I have tried to show how they present each hero’s conflict with those in power over the purpose of human life and political community.

To close, I compare their accounts. Huxley is most prescient in his portrayal of use of science in society. Orwell, however, comprehends much more fully the motive that drives pursuit of stability through science. That motive, as he shows us, is the erotic thrill of achieving dominion. Lewis, in turn, shows us, perhaps with greater insight than the others, that men’s lust for order and grasping for power is an enduring feature

³⁷ Ibid., 369.

of human experience. More importantly, like Huxley and Orwell, Lewis shows us what we lose in our drive for autonomy and dominion. And, even better, he points us to the path to freedom from the lust for power.

Huxley shows us a society that tries to control persons by appeal to base pleasures, accompanied by surveillance and *soma*. Orwell shows us a society that tries to control persons by appeal to base fears, accompanied by surveillance and torture. Both are regimes in which some men attempt to secure power over persons. Huxley shows us that stability must forever be opposed to the risks and unpredictability of the affections and actions that characterize genuinely human relationships. He does not, however, show us why stability is so attractive.

Huxley writes to Orwell, essentially, that the modern world will use Mustapha Mond's methods, not O'Brien's. "My own belief," he says, "is that the ruling oligarchy will find less arduous and wasteful ways of governing and of satisfying its lust for power, and these ways will resemble those which I have described in *Brave New World*."³⁸ But he fails to see that O'Brien's methods will also endure precisely because he fails to see the temptation that motivates men to apply them.

The appearance and methods of power change. Huxley focuses on one form, Orwell on another, Lewis on a combination. The point is what these forms of power have in common: they are all attempts by some humans to convince other humans that the point of their lives is something other than what it actually is—that it is, for example, primarily pleasure, or primarily power, or primarily mere survival.

³⁸ Aldous Huxley, "A Letter to George Orwell," *Letters of Aldous Huxley*. Ed. Grover Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). Quoted in Appendix to Huxley, *Brave New World*, 13.

Orwell excels Huxley in understanding the temptation to gain and exercise power over persons. He conveys the seductive nature of power with greater insight and force than Huxley. Huxley's Mustapha Mond sees that his choice is between stability and real happiness, the kind that entails real sorrow and suffering, but he does not tell us why stability is ultimately desirable. By contrast, Orwell's O'Brien conveys to us, in his actions and words, the erotic thrill of achieving total control over other humans. In other words, Mond sees that there is a conflict between stability and happiness, but O'Brien knows why stability is seductive—because of the thrill that attends the ability to subject and master others.

Importantly, Lewis goes further than Orwell when he identifies the ultimate source of the lust for power—the desire to be God. Orwell sees that power makes men God. He knows men must fail in this endeavor. They must fail, says Winston, because of the human spirit. Lewis sees, similarly but even more clearly, that men must fail because they set themselves up against what is truly human. The attempt to be more than human always results in human destruction. Lewis connects his own story with one of the oldest treatments of this reality, the story of Babel.

In Huxley's World State, in Lewis's England under the N.I.C.E., and in Orwell's Oceania, the goals that orient each society together matter for how they form men, and for the nature of the political rule they legitimize. In summary, these texts portray rulers who strive to destroy men's capacity to become accountable actors. Powerful men in each regime claim unlimited power over others because they work from a

conception of the person, and thus of justice, that fails to recognize the inherent purpose that ultimately makes us accountable actors.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

People without hope not only don't write novels, but what is more to the point, they don't read them. They don't take long looks at anything, because they lack the courage. The way to despair is to refuse to have any kind of experience, and the novel, of course, is a way to have experience.¹

- Flannery O'Connor

I began this study with questions about the possibility and meaning of personal responsibility in the face of political oppression. I wanted to better understand the resources of personal accountability and action. I think that, together, Aldous Huxley, C.S. Lewis, and George Orwell teach us that politics depends upon the renewal of the human capacity for personal responsibility and action.

The nature of political action, as Aristotle and Leo Strauss observe, is that it aims to preserve or achieve a good end for persons and their political community.² The World State, the National Center for Co-ordinated Experiments, and Oceania, however, impose upon their citizens new goals, which are not related to the good of persons or of their society.³ Yet, as John the Savage, Mark Studdock, and Winston Smith learn, to varying degrees, responding to "the longing for justice and the just city" that is at the heart of political experience requires us to care for persons and their good.⁴

¹ Flannery O'Connor, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," in *Mystery and Manners*, 78.

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I; Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?" in *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959.

³ Cf. Alain Besançon, "On the Difficulty of Defining the Soviet Regimes," in *The Great Lie*.

⁴ Quoting Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?"

At the close of this study, I am convinced, now more than ever, that the practice of becoming accountable actors in political community requires us to cultivate integrity in the language we use and in the persons we are becoming. The capacity for personal responsibility is a capacity that belongs to individual human beings. It is a capacity strengthened by friendship and memory, footholds in reality that in turn give life to our vision for justice and the just city. As we practice becoming accountable actors, we become better able to evaluate and act in the face of the constraints of power and the aims of the societies in which we find ourselves.

When I began this study, two main reasons motivated my work. First, like many others, I am drawn to stories of men and women who live with grace and honesty in moments where brutality and betrayal seem to be prevailing. As a girl, I found beautiful and compelling the stories of characters who lived in dehumanizing situations with clear-sightedness and courage. These stories, works of fiction as well as non-fiction, included Ian Serraillier's *Escape from Warsaw*, Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*, Esther Hautzig's *The Endless Steppe*, and Louis Lowry's *Number the Stars*. These are the stories that first quickened my heart as through them I witnessed the resolve, loss, and hope that shape individuals, families, and communities in the face of the abuse of power. In recent years, these stories have included the lives and works of Eric Voegelin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Sophie Scholl and her friends. As I considered what works I wanted to spend a year thinking and writing about, it quickly became clear to me that I wanted to examine books whose central characters fight to hear and heed the call to personal responsibility.

In the course of this study, I wrote about personal responsibility within the context of regimes distinguished by their oppressive nature. *Brave New World*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* invite us to observe different kinds of regimes. John the Savage encounters a regime that coerces persons gently; Winston Smith endures a regime that finds perverse satisfaction in the exercise of force against persons; Mark Studdock enters, at the heart of a regime, an Inner Circle that demands total allegiance. What these regimes have in common is their effort to constrain human conscience and action to conform to a contrived reality. The claim of that contrived reality is, as Václav Havel writes, “that the center of power is identical with the center of truth.”⁵ What makes each central character compelling, insofar as he is compelling, is his awareness of and response to the regime’s attempt to constrain human conscience and action.

Second, I was attracted to a mode of inquiry that is not usually associated with the canon of western political thought: the story. I became interested in stories for epistemological and pedagogical reasons. I wanted to understand how stories work as carriers of ethical insight, and to practice handling a medium that I thought might be a helpful addition to studies in political science with undergraduate students.

I began this study mindful that my intent was not to focus primarily on regimes, laws, and institutions. Instead, I chose to approach politics by way of a study of human action and character. With Aristotle and Aquinas, I want to observe and understand the importance of sound laws and institutions that restrain us in our worst moments and

⁵ Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *The Great Lie*, ed. Flagg F. Taylor IV. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2011, 28.

educate us in our best moments. Without diminishing the significance of laws and institutions, my dissertation builds on the insight that the study of politics encompasses the study of character as well as constitutions. In particular, I was interested in a certain dimension of human character—namely, that which enables a person to answer to a standard of right, even when the persons and organizations of political power around him deny these standards.

My next question was how to conduct a study of personal responsibility. As I read *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *That Hideous Strength*, a few striking themes emerged. As I reflected on the practice of responsibility, I discovered that it requires access to a coherent and adequate language, a sense of individuality and purpose, and a horizon of action not limited one's immediate political society. I examined these elements, one at a time. In the chapters above, I open with a brief reflection on the theme and then examine the theme as it appeared in each novel.

Once I had identified the main themes of my inquiry, before I could proceed to an analysis of the texts, I found that I needed to know how and why stories worked. I knew from experience that stories were capable of conveying the moral dimensions of human and political experience. I belong, however, to a culture that is prone to overvalue intellect and certainty, and to devalue story and imagination. I found in C.S. Lewis's epistemology resources for revalidating a healthy relationship between intellect and imagination. Aware of classical distinctions between noetic and dianoetic reason, I adopted Lewis's language of imagination and intellect to speak of similar phenomena. Next, to explain why authors write stories to deal with political questions and what

these stories convey, I drew on Lewis's understanding of knowledge and moral meaning, informed as it is by classical and medieval sources. In these closing pages, I want to conduct a general comparison of the texts, and then consider the relationship between responsibility and justice.

REFLECTION ON THE STORIES

One of the advantages of reading these stories side-by-side, as I have in this inquiry, is that each story highlights strengths and reveals weaknesses in the others. For example, George Orwell clearly presents the most detailed, resonant portrayal of intellectual and emotional manipulation. It is painful and frightening to read Winston's struggle, in daily life and during his torture at O'Brien's hand, to cling to what he knows to be real. Likewise, Orwell's treatment of language is striking. He makes us see the importance of language for expressing reality, and the deep perversity in abusing language to obscure reality. While *Nineteen Eighty-Four* masterfully portrays Winston's fight for sanity in the face of political abuse, his end and the story's close leave the reader with fundamental questions. At worst, the story's conclusion shows us a man who is beaten beyond redemption. At best, it is appropriately unsettling, and ultimately helpful, as it shows us a man who came to know that meaningful allegiances are bonds to persons, not to abstractions, and to affirm reality independent of the Party, so far as it lies with him. I think the latter is a compelling interpretation of a story that draws us to ask our own questions alongside Winston.

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is remarkable for its ability to demonstrate that the project for human perfection through technology—the quest for stability through pleasure—ends in slavery. Toward this end, conversations Huxley constructs with World Controller Mond at the start and finish of the book are marvelous moments. In addition, while Lewis and Orwell show their heroes interacting meaningfully with works of literature, Huxley alone offers a sustained study of literature as a source of personal formation.

Despite these great strengths, *Brave New World* turns out, on the whole, to be the weakest of the three novels featured in this study. Throughout the story, Huxley juxtaposes the conventions of the World State with the banned concept of *purpose*. He develops this conflict in the closing conversation between John the Savage, Helmholtz Watson, and Mustafa Mond. This conversation brilliantly illuminates the tension between, on the one hand, the project for human control, and the other, the possibility of being truly human, an experience that encompasses real happiness and joy as well as real sorrow and suffering. Yet the ending Huxley gives the story—the Savage's insane self-destruction—reveals a weakness that may undermine the whole work. It leaves the reader with questions. What is it, exactly, that has been John's guiding light throughout the story? Where and why did it fail him? Did it fail him, or did he fail it? What now?

C.S. Lewis excels in his depiction of the abuse of language within the bureaucratic institutions of the modern state. His character John Wither dribbles words that are meaningless, without bounds or content. Wither's character and language are, I think, precisely the kind Orwell diagnoses when he says that, when abused, words and

meaning part company.⁶ At another level, *That Hideous Strength* stands out as the most poetic of the three stories. It embodies the qualities of myth and transcendence in a way that makes it perhaps the most meaningful and mysterious of the three works. At the same time, as others have noted, Lewis burdens the book with too many plotlines and characters. Finally, like both Orwell and Huxley, but more than either, Lewis makes us see the role of beauty in moral experience. Incidentally, if there were one chapter I would add to this inquiry, it would be a chapter on the role of beauty in making men responsible actors.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND MORAL IMAGINATION

This study of personal responsibility and poetic imagination has value for readers, for students of political science, and for teachers. As they appeal to poetic imagination, Aldous Huxley, C.S. Lewis, and George Orwell help restore its role as our means for moral experience—that is, they help restore imagination to its role, as Lewis says, as the organ of meaning. More immediately, all three stories issue a challenge to the reader. By taking the reader on a journey of challenge, choice, oppression, force, and sometimes grace, each story presents the reader with opportunities to reflect on the hero and his actions, and then to ask questions and make choices alongside the hero.

⁶ George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, 962.

Brave New World, *That Hideous Strength*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* situate us in the space between reality as John, Mark, and Winston slowly discover it, on the one hand, and the contrived reality imposed by the regimes in which they live, on the other. Eric Voegelin deals with the conflict between reality and the contrived image of another reality at the close of his analysis in the lectures published as *Hitler and the Germans*.

There Voegelin says,

Even if Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche thoroughly murder God and explain him away as dead, divine being remains eternal and man must still get on with living his life sealed by his creatureliness and by death. When concupiscent fantasy shifts the accents of reality, it then superimposes a false image on reality. We speak of this fantasy image as the second reality.⁷

Voegelin goes on to highlight the major consequence of the friction between first and second reality.

And when man tries to live in this second reality, when he attempts to transform himself from the *imago Dei* into the *imago hominis*, then conflicts arise with the first reality, whose order continually exists.

These texts illuminate in narrative mode the substitution of second reality for first reality that justified the destruction of millions of human beings in recent history.

Finally, this study in personal responsibility and poetic imagination has implications for teaching political science. It confirms literature as a special means for communicating and raising fundamental questions in politics—question about human nature, the use and abuse of political power, the influence of institutions on persons,

⁷ Eric Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 262.

and possible resources for becoming responsible actors in the face of challenges from without and from within.

Political philosophy, as we find it in Aristotle and Augustine, it is about the quest for right order in relations between persons and communities. At a very basic level, it is about our place in reality. For that kind of inquiry, literature presents itself as an aid of great potential value. Indeed, as Flannery O'Connor writes,

The type of mind that can understand good fiction is not necessarily the educated mind, but it is at all times the kind of mind that is willing to have its sense of mystery deepened by contact with reality, and its sense of reality deepened by contact with mystery.⁸

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE QUEST FOR JUSTICE

As we follow their stories, we see Winston Smith, John the Savage, Jane Studdock, and Mark Studdock discover and develop themselves as individuals capable of action. They come to know themselves as actors, and they act. In all three stories, moreover, the hero senses that he is accountable to some standard of right, or justice, which is independent and immovable. But to what do these actors find themselves accountable?

Winston Smith names the human spirit and, finally, life itself, as the principle that will defeat O'Brien and the Party's game to achieve perpetually the thrill of victory. Indeed, the collapse of totalitarian regimes around the world seems to confirm Winston's hope. But what stands beyond the crushed human spirit? Why is it that,

⁸ Flannery O'Connor, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," in *Mystery and Manners*, 79.

despite the endurance of O'Brien's whose picture of success is a boot stamping a human face for ever, life itself wins out time and again?

John the Savage answers to a vision of nobility and purity, which seems, however, to be not ultimately convincing to him or to Huxley. The ending Huxley gives to the Savage and to the story is not persuasive. To be sure, the conversation between Mond, Helmholtz, and John is engaging and satisfying: it presents a choice between men's dehumanizing attempts at control, which utilize pleasure as mass sedative, on the one hand, and, on the other, the possibility of a real happiness that entails both suffering and sorrow, but which remains attractive because it resonates with the profound knowledge that humans are made for a purpose—even for God, as the sources Mond introduces claim. After this conversation and the farewell between Helmholtz, Bernard, and John, there is a break in the text.⁹ This break in the text, I think, also marks a break in the logic of the narrative. The ending that follows the break loses coherence. It is not satisfying as tragedy. In fact, Huxley became dissatisfied with the ending and later reconsidered it.¹⁰

After the break in the text, the Savage subjects himself to rituals of penitence and, in the end, engages in a night of insane sensuality and then hangs himself. One can contrast the Savage's penitence—namely, his isolation, his attempts to prove himself worthy, his endeavor to beat the lust, sloth, and greed out of his head and out of his body—on the one hand, with the high humor, the festal gladness, the humble, mutual

⁹ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 243.

¹⁰ See Huxley's retrospective in his Preface to the 1976 Penguin edition. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1976 [1932]).

self-giving and anticipation of consummation that closes *That Hideous Strength*, on the other. The ending Huxley gives the Savage does not seem to make any sense.

Then again, maybe it makes perfect sense. It is true to experience, is it not, that it is nearly impossible for any human to hold on to what is real with clarity, when the swirling opinions, pressures, coercion, and temptation around him and within him threaten to overwhelm? The only times the ordinary heroes we journey with—Winston, Mark, Jane, the Savage—manage to keep their heads, hearts, and bodies in integrity and in courage are moments marked, however faintly, by some kind of grace. Interestingly, right at the start of his self-imposed exile, Huxley has the Savage throw himself into a thornbush in an attempt to battle his lustful thoughts about Lenina. It is the very same discipline for the same sin that St. Benedict (born AD 480) inflicted on himself during his stint as a hermit.¹¹ Before long, however, Benedict caught onto a very different understanding of the human person and community that led him to found the monastic order that still exists today. What Benedict saw, which the Savage never saw, was a gentler yet more difficult path to being whole, to living the life we are meant to live: that is the path of the individual in community with others and God.

Mark Studdock answers to the Normal. While I have described the scenes in which Mark meets the Normal (above), I want to focus here on Jane Studdock's encounter with the same standard of right. After wrestling with herself for years, Jane one day has an experience that brings her face to face with the standard which she has

¹¹ See Pope Gregory I, *Life and Miracles of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press), 1986, 7-8.

long sensed but refused to acknowledge. She is out on a walk when, Lewis says, she crosses some kind of boundary. She has come into the presence of what claims her. She experiences the claim as a demand like nothing she had experienced before. "This demand," Lewis writes,

which now pressed upon her was not, even by analogy, like any other demand. It was the origin of all right demands and contained them. In its light you could understand them; but from them you could know nothing of it. There was nothing, and never had been anything, like this. And now there was nothing except this. Yet also, everything had been like this; only by being like this had anything existed.¹²

The special nature of this demand is that it is, as Lewis writes earlier, "more like a dance than a drill."¹³ Thus, in different forms, yet unmistakably, call of justice reverberates through the experience of characters in each story.

¹² Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 315.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 147.

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